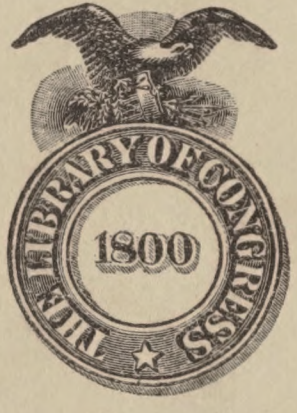
CAPTAIN BECKY'S MASQUERADE

MARGARET LOVE SANDERSON



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The Captain Becky Series

CAPTAIN BECKY'S MASQUERADE

"I MUST TAKE OFF MY HAT TO THE 'LADY WITH THE FAN.'"

Captain Becky's Masquerade

BY

Margaret Love Sanderson

The Reilly & Britton Co.
Chicago

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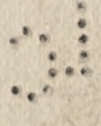

Captain Becky's Masquerade

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CAPTAIN BECKY'S MASQUERADE

CHAPTER I

A LETTER FROM LUCILE

"Marjorie! Postman's coming!"

"Right down, mother dear."

And right down she was, dancing into the library where her mother sat peering out of the bay window. Clasping an arm around her daughter's waist, Mrs. Beckwith glanced at Marjorie with happy content in her eyes. A very different Marjorie this was from the thin, weakly girl who had departed for Florida the preceding winter! Now her cheeks were flushed with health and the sheer happiness of living. But her face had not lost that delicacy of contour that was its greatest charm, and which was accentuated by the golden-brown hair that rippled over her forehead.

"Here he is!"

Marjorie darted to the front door, greeted the postman with a cheery "Good morning!" and returned to the library with three letters in her

hand. Glancing quickly at the superscriptions, she handed one to her mother and laid the second aside, while she began to turn the third over and over in her hands.

"There's a letter from Mrs. Hatton to you," she exclaimed, "and one from Lucile to me. And I haven't replied to her last one yet! I wonder where she is? The postmark shows some place up in New Hampshire——"

"Perhaps you had better open it and see," smiled Mrs. Beckwith, who was already unfolding Mrs. Hatton's letter. "How about the other one?"

"Oh, just a note from Schuyler," replied Marjorie carelessly. "He's at school in New Jersey, you know."

With that she followed her mother's advice and opened the letter from Lucile. A few months before this Marjorie had quit school and left Chicago for a visit with her aunt in Florida. While there she had met the Egbert Hattons, of whom the mother, son and two daughters, a prominent eastern family, were spending a few weeks in Florida. Marjorie had a natural feeling of independence and, as her father was not rich and was just at that time under a financial strain, she had resolved to pay her own expenses and make a little money besides, if it were possible to do so.

Accordingly, far from leading the humdrum hotel life with her aunt which she had looked forward to, Marjorie had chartered a small schooner and had taken the Egbert Hattons on a cruise of several weeks on the Indian River. They had met with many adventures, which have been described in another place, Marjorie had been well recompensed by the wealthy easterners and, better than all, she had found in them warm and very real friends.

"Oh, mother!" broke out Marjorie as she scanned her four pages scrawled over in the fashionable large writing of Lucile Hatton, "guess what——"

"Wait a moment," smiled her mother, who was absorbed in her own letter; "Mrs. Hatton is writing to me about it too."

"It sounds too good to be really true," sighed the girl as she laid down the letter. With her hands in her lap she stared out the window dreamily. Her eyes sparkled and her cheeks were tinged with more color than usual as she pictured to herself what those letters might mean to her.

Lucile Hatton was a few months younger than Marjorie but her more extended social life and her father's great wealth had made her in some ways much older than the Chicago girl. Despite Lucile's one-time tendency toward snobbishness,

Marjorie liked her, and Lucile fully reciprocated the feeling. Then there was keen-eyed, genial Mr. Hatton; his wife, who was not unlike Marjorie's own mother; Schuyler, a year older than Lucile; and finally little Ruth, who was only ten, but who had adopted "Captain Becky" as her particular chum and confidant.

"Well, what do you think of it, mother?" asked Marjorie as Mrs. Beckwith laid down the letter. "Isn't it just too splendid for anything?"

"Indeed it is! I'm *so* glad, dear! And Mrs. Hatton is really sincere, too. What does Lucile say?"

"Here, we'll trade letters. But I know it's too good to be true, mother! Oh, dear, if only I could go and take you with me—away from this hot old place!"

Mrs. Beckwith smiled in response as she took Lucile's letter and held it up. The Hattons had nicknamed Marjorie "Captain Becky," and so Lucile addressed her. After a few inconsequential lines the letter read:

"But here's what I want to say, Becky dear. We're all up here in New Hampshire at father's new cottage—that is, all except Schuyler. He'll be here next week when school is out. It's simply heavenly up here among the mountains! We've

got heaps of ponies and a race track, and Sunapee Lake is only ten miles away and—Oh, ever so many things!

"Now listen hard! It's the end of June now; why can't you come and spend August with us? We have plenty of room; there'll be a crowd over at the lake and a lot of our friends have farms and cottages all around here. I've just been talking to mother about it and she's simply wild to have you. So is Ruth. Say you will, Becky!

"Mother is going to write to your mother to-day, and I know she'll not object. Clothes don't matter a bit up here, so bring your oldest. We'll go riding and motoring and do everything we can think of—and the farm is a perfect dear! You'll fall in love with it right away."

"She writes a very nice letter, dear," remarked Mrs. Beckwith, returning the pages to Marjorie. "It's a splendid opportunity for you, and the mountain air will do you a great deal of good. You've been working pretty hard since you got home from Florida and a month away from everything——"

"But, mother!" broke in Marjorie, suddenly. "I know it's perfectly lovely, but how can I go? I'd have to have dresses, and the bare railroad fare would be so much—we just can't do it, mother!"

Mrs. Beckwith arose and, standing beside her daughter, again slipped an arm around the latter's waist.

"Come, little girl, don't be foolish!" she said. "The Hattons know you and like you and that is quite enough. They know perfectly well that you can't afford to dress like Lucile and they won't expect it. What is it Mrs. Hatton says?" She picked up the letter from Lucile's mother and read the last paragraph to Marjorie.

"And don't let Becky worry about clothes, please! We all live very simply here at the farm. The young people have dances and parties occasionally but there is nothing formal at all. We practically live outdoors all the time and enjoy every minute of it. We all look forward to having your daughter spend a few weeks with us and I am sure she would enjoy herself. So she must not disappoint us!"

"That's all very well," replied Marjorie after a minute. "But if you only knew how Lucile dresses, and Mrs. Hatton herself! I haven't a single dress that would do for one of their dances, I know!"

"Perhaps not, dear. But if they are the right kind of people they won't care about that. They know that you can at least afford to look neat and clean, whether you can afford to wear hand-em-

broidered waists or not. Mrs. Hatton didn't say that, of course, but she implied it very clearly and sensibly, I think. No, they want *you*, and not your dresses, Marjorie. But we'll not discuss this just now; wait till father comes home to-night and we can talk it all over quietly and comfortably. He used to live somewhere in New Hampshire when he was a boy, so he'll know what it's like."

"All right, mother!" laughed Marjorie, with one of her sudden changes of mood, as she kissed her and caught up the letter from Schuyler, "I'll forget all about it until to-night!"

She ran upstairs to her own room, which was small but kept with her accustomed neatness. Taking a hairpin from her dresser she quickly opened the envelope and drew out the letter.

"Dear Cap," she read with a smile, "I was awfully glad to get your note! Why don't you write me a real letter sometime? You haven't got anything to do except read books and sew and I think you might write more than just a few lines! I'm mighty glad you don't talk about clothes like most girls do"—here Becky's brow clouded for an instant—"for every time I get a letter from you I can see you standing at the wheel beside Captain Sam, while the good old *Olivette* slaps along. Say, we certainly had a dandy time

down there, all right! Going back next winter?

"School's over this week. Three more exams, then I'll dig out and join the folks up at dad's farm. I suppose Lucile gives you all the news, though! Dad's got a new cottage. He's taken up the big car, and my chum, Billy Dustin, is going to his folks' place at Lake Sunapee, near our place. Billy's got a peach of a motor boat, Cap! Wish you were going to take command of her!

"Well, write me a good one next time, will you? Tell me all about what you're going to do this summer. Don't you want a good first mate for next winter's cruise?

"Yours truly,

"Schuyler Hatton."

Marjorie tucked away the letter in the "correspondence drawer" of her dresser, then pulled out the three lower drawers. First pinning up a stray lock of hair, she leaned over and made a critical examination of the contents of the drawers.

"You're too old," she decided, "and you're all patched to death, and you don't fit well around the neck. Now, you might do——" she held up a pretty embroidered waist, inspected it, then slapped it down in disgust——"only you're all stained with sea-water. You're a fine lot of dresses to go visit-

ing among millionaires!'' Becky slammed the drawers shut suddenly in vexation, caught sight of her flushed face in the glass and laughed at herself with a new light in her eyes.

''I don't care! They know perfectly well that I have to work for a living and that I can't afford to have dresses like Lucile has! Maybe I won't go at all, but if I do I'll go just as they know me. And I won't put on any airs, either!''

When Mr. Beckwith arrived home that evening he read the letters carefully at the supper-table. When they had adjourned to the library and had settled down for a comfortable discussion, he gave his opinion very decidedly.

''I think it's the best thing that ever happened to you, Marjorie!'' he said slowly, Mrs. Hatton's letter in his hand. ''Their place is near Cornish Flats, in Sullivan County. It's right near the Vermont line and I lived in East Cornish until I was sixteen, so I know the country. You'd never find a more interesting spot in a long time. Wild and rugged, with queer little old towns lost in every valley, and houses that date back——''

''But I'm not thinking about the country, father!'' protested Becky. ''What worries me is visiting such wealthy people and the expense of it! Why, I suppose that the 'cottage,' as they call it, would be a regular palace to me!''

"No doubt it would," nodded Mr. Beckwith. "But you can never gain anything worth while without paying for it, little girl. Look at old man Hobrough next door here. You can stick in one place all your life as he has done, know nothing except your own petty environment, never develop or broaden out a mite, and all because you're afraid of investing a few dollars. You don't want to come to be like that old chap, do you? I never knew you were stingy——"

"I'm not stingy," laughed Marjorie, who knew that her father did not mean all he said. "The only question is—will it pay me?"

"I am sure it would," spoke up her mother decisively. "You'll have a few weeks of very different life, my dear. You're not the kind of girl to come back home discontented because you can't have their luxuries all the time. If you were, I wouldn't think of it for a minute. Yes, I feel sure it would be a good investment, as your father says."

"That's what it is," agreed Mr. Beckwith, "simply an investment. You have definitely decided, Marjorie, that you wish to be independent of my support. I appreciate that, for I think every girl should be able to support herself just as every boy should; but you've got to remember that in order to do so you must learn as much as possible

of the world around you. This is a great chance for you to mix with a certain class of people whom you might not know otherwise. You'll find plenty in them to like and plenty to dislike and you'll come back very glad you went.

"Besides, the trip itself will be well worth while. You'll enjoy yourself immensely up in that country; the air will be good for you and even if you come back broke it'll pay. By the way, how much money have you on hand?"

"I've got thirteen dollars left out of my savings-bank account, which took me to Florida, and besides that I have one hundred and ten dollars left out of what I cleared from the *Olivette,*" replied Becky promptly. "That makes just one hundred and twenty-three dollars. It doesn't seem very much to go all the way to New Hampshire on and stay a month!"

"Why, you're a regular plutocrat!" laughed her father. "It won't cost more than fifty dollars to take you there and back, which leaves you nearly seventy-five dollars for clothes. And don't let dresses worry you, little girl. If you look as neat and pretty as you do right now I guess no one's going to find any fault. These Hattons seem to be mighty sensible people and, besides, you can't put on many frills up in that country or I miss my guess!"

"Well, I hope not," assented Becky dubiously. "Anyhow, they know I haven't any frills to put on. They'd only laugh at me if I did pretend to have all the things I can't afford, so—I guess I'll go!"

"Good for you!" laughed her father, giving her a hug and a kiss. "You're all right, Captain Becky! Now it'll be up to you, mother, to do some planning on dresses, eh?"

"No, it won't!" retorted Marjorie promptly. "Two or three plain white ones, just about like I had in Florida, will do. We've got a whole month to make them in, and I can buy a good ready-made heavy suit to travel in."

"You'll have to have one really nice dress, dear," added her mother. "Remember that there will probably be parties and dances and all kinds of entertainments."

"Well," admitted Becky rather dubiously, "I suppose I'll have to have a party dress pretty soon anyway. Still, I don't see why a plain white wash one wouldn't be quite good enough for any summer resort."

"We can settle all that later," smiled Mrs. Beckwith in reply. "The main thing is to be sure that you're going."

"And I'm sure of that now," laughed Becky happily. "I only wish that you could come with

me, mother dear, instead of sticking in this old city!''

''Oh, we'll get away,'' laughed her father. ''We may run off for a couple of weeks while you're gone.''

''Well, I hope you will,'' answered the girl, gathering up her letters. ''Now I guess I'll write to Lucile before we change our minds!''

CHAPTER II

BECKY TAKES A JOURNEY

It was an eventful month that followed Becky's decision and the days passed all too quickly, filled as they were with preparations. After a long discussion Becky and her mother decided that, besides the traveling suit, which would do for rough weather and trips, she would have to have a Peter Thompson—homemade, of course—one party dress, and a supply of simple white wash waists and skirts. Then the hat question came up and here Marjorie took a decided stand.

"It's no use, mother! I'll fix up that old brown hat to go with the traveling dress and we'll pick out a nice little toque down at Field's. Anyway, I guess I won't wear a hat much in fine weather."

"But a Peter Thompson—on a farm!" protested Mrs. Beckwith.

"I know," returned Marjorie, "but then there's a lake near there, you know, and anyway you can use 'em for tennis or house-dresses or 'most anything."

So the materials were bought, a seamstress en-

gaged and the work began. For three weeks Marjorie and her mother worked almost night and day, while on every chair and table were heaps of half-finished dress goods that nearly drove Mr. Beckwith crazy.

"Why can't you folks keep your stuff in the sewing room!" he demanded one night as he pulled his tobacco from underneath a half-made P. T., and Becky made a mad rush to save the precious blouse from being dragged to the floor. "If this goes on much longer I'll fit up a room in the barn!"

"I dare you to!" laughed his wife. "Look out! You're pulling that lace off the——"

"Oh!" shrieked Becky as she rescued the filmy stuff. "You've spilled tobacco all over this lawn——"

"That's enough!" cried Mr. Beckwith hastily as he fled to the hall and seized his hat. "This is no place for me! Good night!"

But he returned an hour later with a very effectual peace-offering in the shape of a quart of ice cream and promised to keep his tobacco pouch in his study thereafter on condition that Becky should keep his big chair free of dress material. The compromise was placed on a substantial basis by a freshly baked cake to match the ice cream and thereafter the lounging chair was kept clear.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Marjorie, three days before her departure, as she gazed on the bright new trunk and the pile of things to go into it. "I wish I could wear them all at once! I've never had so many fine things in all my life! And *how* my bank balance has shrunk!"

"Never mind that, dear," smiled her mother cheerfully as she added to the pile the box which contained the light blue toque trimmed with silver à la Jeanne Maubourg. "No worrying over money this time! You are going to have a real vacation and enjoy every minute of it. By the way, whatever became of that funny boy you were telling us about—Lewis something?"

"Lewis Ahlswede?" laughed Becky as her mind went back to the "devil" on the Melbourne *Times* who had filled such a curious niche on the cruise of the *Olivette.* "I don't know! Yes I do, too—I got a postal from him a month ago, don't you remember? He was going north. The Hattons promised to find him something to do. Poor Lewis! I hope he realizes some of his ambitions. Well, how are we going to get all this pile packed in that little trunk?"

"Three days left for that, Marjorie," replied Mrs. Beckwith. "It'll go in, never fear! Wait till father begins to make things fly!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Becky in dismay.

"Not if I know it, mother! No, indeed. I'll pack up this trunk myself and you can help me, right now!"

Thereupon Marjorie set to work with feverish energy and before Mr. Beckwith came home that evening the trunk was packed, locked and strapped, ready to be sent off. The next two days were spent in packing and repacking the suit case, whose contents were to last Becky on the three-days' journey. More letters had been exchanged with Lucile and the details of the trip were complete.

"You'll be met in New York by Uncle Jim," explained Mr. Beckwith, referring to his brother who lived in that city. "He'll put you on the New York Central and at Springfield, Massachusetts, you'll have to change to the Boston and Maine. Here's your through transportation to Windsor where the Hattons will meet you."

"With their new car, I hope," added Marjorie happily but just a trifle doubtfully. "You'd better write down all those changes and the time and everything, father!"

"Here you are," laughed her father, holding out a card. "Be sure and have Uncle Jim set your watch on for you—the time changes, you know. Are you sure you told Lucile what train you'd be on?"

"Why, no!" replied Becky. "I told her when my train left Chicago, though, so——"

She was interrupted by a peal of laughter from her father and it took her fully a minute to realize the cause. She was rescued from her confusion by Mrs. Beckwith, however, who commanded her husband to send a telegram at once with the missing information and, as no great harm had been done, Becky soon came to appreciate the joke herself.

The New York Limited pulled out early Monday morning. With her grip safely bestowed under the seat and the porter attended to, Becky stood on the platform till the very last minute. Then, with a hasty kiss and a last wave, she sprang up the steps, and by the time she gained the window the platform had disappeared and the gray walls of the Twelfth Street Station were slipping past.

Marjorie was well supplied with magazines and after removing her hat she settled down comfortably to enjoy herself. Her double seat was shared by a rather faded-pretty and washed-out looking woman, as Becky mentally described her after a glance. The woman was evidently not very well-to-do; her clothes had been mended repeatedly and Becky caught more than one of their fellow travelers glancing at their section rather scornfully. However, she was soon too much interested in her

magazines to pay much attention to anyone else, and the morning passed off uneventfully, without a word having been exchanged between them.

With the first call for luncheon Marjorie went forward to the dining car. When she returned to her seat she found the quiet little woman tossing a bag out of the window.

"Aren't you going to the diner?" she asked impulsively, and then stopped short, realizing her own lack of tact.

"No," smiled the woman rather faintly. "I'm only going to Detroit and it doesn't matter."

They fell into conversation and Marjorie learned that her companion was rejoining her husband who had gone to Detroit in search of work; that she considered a Pullman a terrible extravagance and had been all her life, so it seemed to the girl, frightfully poor. Mrs. Simms was an uncomplaining woman but as little glimmerings of life-troubles sifted through her words Marjorie began to feel a great pity for her companion, mingled with a desire to help her in some way.

They were nearly in Detroit by this time and Mrs. Simms placed her battered suit case on the seat. From it she took a very limited toilet traveling-set. Becky's eyes widened as she thought of the neat, pretty little set that lay beneath her feet

and, when the other woman went to the washroom as they flashed into the city, she acted on one of her impulsive ideas.

Quickly opening her own suit case she took out her own toilet set, quickly extracted one or two really necessary articles and leaned over the other suit case. Hastily scribbling a word on her card, she slipped the rubber-wrapped case under a folded skirt, reclosed the battered grip and took up her magazine as Mrs. Simms returned. A hasty farewell and the "washed-out woman" disappeared in charge of the porter.

"I don't care!" thought Becky, her cheeks flushed. "Maybe it wasn't nice, but I *felt* like doing it! It's new and pretty and maybe it'll make her feel better every morning to see it lying on her dresser."

With which thought Becky buried herself again in a magazine and dismissed the subject. The weather was not unpleasantly warm but she was filled with despair at the dust and cinders which filled the car and made frequent washing necessary. She glanced at her waist that evening in dismay.

"I've got a clean one in the valise," she reflected, "but I'm going to save that till I get to Windsor. Oh, well, this will do for New York,

anyhow! It's a mercy that I picked out a blue suit to travel in."

She awoke next morning to find the train entering the New York station. She dressed hastily and with a final pat at her hair put on her hat and rang for the porter.

"Gracious!" she thought as she looked in the mirror, "I look *horribly* old with my hair on top and this veil! I hope Uncle Jim will know me."

She had not seen her uncle for two years but she had barely reached the platform when he came striding up and greeted her with a hearty kiss.

"My, you're quite grown up!" he exclaimed as he held her off and looked her over with a twinkle in his eye. "I wasn't sure it was you until I saw your initials on the suit case! How's everyone?"

"Fine," laughed Becky, replacing her veil. "Are uncles always so—so nice?"

"Of course" asserted Uncle Jim stoutly. "Especially when they have such attractive looking nieces to meet! Now, how long have you in town?"

Becky produced her card and they found that she had an hour before her New York Central train left for Springfield. So the suit case was checked and for one delightful hour Becky was whirled through New York streets in a taxi, returning to the station barely in time to jump

aboard and kiss her uncle good-bye—a formality which he strongly insisted on.

"You'll have to spend at least a whole day with me on your way home!" he announced as the train began to move. "Be sure and let me know when you're coming!"

"I will. Good-bye!" called back Marjorie, and the first part of her journey was over. She found this train very different from the luxurious "flyer" that had brought her from Chicago in less than a day, but she was enjoying herself immensely and cared very little for her surroundings. She was still on board a Pullman but the other passengers were all drummers except for two boys who sat across the aisle from Becky.

These two were full of animated talk on various subjects, intended to reach the ear of the pretty girl in the opposite section, so Becky discreetly retired behind her magazine. After several sly glances she decided that neither of the boys was bad-looking and that the red-haired one was positively funny when he tried to be. She was suddenly startled to find him bowing in an exaggerated manner before her while his companion grinned from across the aisle.

"I beg your pardon," he said politely, looking with his merry blue eyes into Becky's rather

angry darker ones, "but I think you dropped this."

And he held out a handkerchief which Becky recognized and accepted in no little confusion. But the red-haired boy was not through.

"Pardon me again," and his eyes twinkled, "but—ah—could I help you—er—in any way——"

Becky was half frozen up, when the sight of the second boy grinning covertly showed her that it was only a joke, and she promptly grew angry—although she didn't show it in the least. Assuming her very sweetest smile as the red-haired chap stammered in his evident embarrassment and seemed just about to lose his nerve, she broke in:

"Why, certainly. Bring me a glass of water, please."

"Ah—why, sure!" Off dashed the boy, returning an instant later with a glass of water. Becky took it, drank and handed back the empty glass with a murmured word of thanks. Then she very decidedly picked up her magazine and hid her burning face from view. She suddenly realized that she had acted in an extremely unbecoming fashion and her only excuse was the grin that had stirred her wrath. The two boys evidently felt the same way, for they disappeared shortly after and Becky saw no more of them—until later.

At Springfield she had no trouble in making connections and the Boston and Maine took her into a very different country. The time flew past so quickly that Becky could scarcely realize that her journey was over when the conductor called out "Windsor" and they flashed into a small city, beside the river, with the blue mountains in the distance.

Standing in the car vestibule as the train stopped, Becky caught one glimpse of a tremendous blue touring car, waved her hand at a circle of familiar faces and, with an excited shout from a well-known voice in her ears, stepped off the car and was clasped in Lucile's arms. The journey was over.

CHAPTER III

SCHUYLER TO THE RESCUE

They were all there except Mrs. Hatton. Ruth clung to "Captain Becky," as Marjorie was now invariably known, with undisguised delight.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mr. Hatton as he shook hands, "you don't know how good it is to see you. We've been looking forward nearly all summer to Captain Becky's arrival."

Becky felt a little gulp in her throat at the hearty sincerity in his voice and turned to shake hands with Schuyler with a feeling of relief. She caught a glance of amusement from Lucile as the boy muttered something in confusion. Then Mr. Hatton gave her trunk checks to the chauffeur and they all entered the big car.

"Oh, what a beauty!" cried Becky as she and Lucile and Ruth climbed into the tonneau. "I never saw a car like this one, never! Why, it's——"

"It's an English car," laughed Mr. Hatton. "Schuyler, you get up in front beside Louis and let me in the tonneau."

Schuyler obeyed with a crestfallen face while Becky's trunk was securely strapped in place.

"Does it fit all right, Louis?" asked Mr. Hatton, pausing to watch the operation.

"Yes, m'sieu."

"Very well. Go ahead."

"I suppose you're just dying of hunger," chattered Lucile as they sped away silently and without a jar. "Why *do* you live away out west, Becky? It must be awful to travel so far."

"Not a bit of it," laughed Becky. "Uncle Jim met me in New York but he forgot to get me any breakfast and I was too bewildered to think about it. I had luncheon on the diner coming up but I'm quite ready for something more substantial, thank you! Get through your exams all right, Schuyler?"

"Sure!" Schuyler half twisted around in his seat. "Flunked geometry as usual but that don't matter. Say, the fellows are just crazy to meet you!"

"The fellows!" repeated Becky in surprise. "Why, who?"

"He's talking about Billy Dustin and Jack Humphrey," explained Lucile. "Billy is Schuyler's chum and Jack's his cousin. Why not call up and have them come over to-night, Sky?"

"Don't know 'bout that," replied her brother

dubiously. "They went down to the city Friday an' maybe they aren't back yet. I'll call up anyhow."

"Now tell us all about yourself," commanded Mr. Hatton. "Billy and Jack will keep till later. What have you been doing since we saw you?"

"Not very much," confessed Becky. "I made up some school work I missed by going to Florida, that's all. The rest of the time I've just been reading and sewing and loafing."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Lucile despairingly. "I wish I had time to read and sew. Why, until we came up here I never had a single minute. There was always the tailor or a party or a dance or a wedding or something that I had to go to. It seems perfectly dead up here."

"She's gettin' broke in to it now," grinned Schuyler, refusing to be left out of the conversation. "You ought to see her chasin' around the race track with Bob Carmack. She beat him three out of four heats Saturday an' she's gettin' a line on the singles cup over at the club—tennis, you know."

"Race track?" Becky knit her brows. "Why, you don't mean——"

"You'll see," chuckled Mr. Hatton. "I'm raising some rather good ponies on the farm and we have a regular race track laid out behind the

barns. Every week or so we have a meet, with prizes and all the rest of it. You ride, don't you?"

Now Becky had never been astride a horse in her life. But she refused to acknowledge it before Lucile and concluded that a pony might not be so hard to tackle after all. Her hesitation was ended by a questioning glance from Schuyler and she tossed her head with a laugh.

"Oh, I guess I can make out all right. How far is it to the farm, Mr. Hatton?"

"Only a mile farther on. It'll be too dark to show you around to-day, but that can wait."

In another two or three minutes they swept up to a high iron fence and arching concrete gateway. From this a broad, graveled drive led through a grove of trees toward a large white house which stood on a little knoll above. As they approached it Becky gave a gasp, for in her wildest dreams of what Lucile's "cottage" would be like she had not imagined this.

The house was a large three-story building in colonial style, with pillars and portico in front. The gathering dusk added to its impressiveness, and lights were already shining from a score of windows as the car stopped beneath the portico with a blare of the horn. Before Becky had reached the ground she caught sight of Mrs. Hat-

ton approaching to welcome her, and a portly, erect figure in livery just behind her.

"I'm very glad indeed to see you," said Lucile's mother as she kissed Becky cordially. "You don't know how we've been looking forward to this visit, my dear. Now, I suppose you want to go to your room? Dinner is at eight, you know." Without pausing for Becky's answer, Mrs. Hatton turned to the portly figure in the doorway.

"James, have Miss Beckwith's trunk taken to her room at once and call Briggs to attend her."

"Yes, madam," replied the butler in a sepulchrally respectful voice. Becky felt herself becoming rapidly bewildered as she followed Mrs. Hatton into the hallway, brilliantly lighted and decorated, with tapestries on the walls and rich eastern rugs. A butler on a farm! And Briggs—surely it could not be——

But it was. In spite of Lucile's arm around her Becky moved as in a dream up a broad flight of stairs and along a hallway. She felt herself stopped at an open door. As Lucile playfully pushed her in, Becky saw the most wonderful of rooms, all in white and gold with bird's-eye maple furnishings and—Briggs!

There was no doubt about it. The neat, trim little woman who was opening her suit case and

who hurried forward to take her hat and gloves was a maid. For a moment Becky submitted to being disrobed; then, just as the door shut, she regained her senses.

"Lucile!" she cried desperately, conscious of impending tears. "Lucile! Come back for a minute! Quick!"

Lucile popped back into the room and Becky threw her arms around the other girl's neck.

"Send that—that Briggs away, Lucile! I've got to say something to you!"

Lucile obeyed the whisper and when the door closed behind the wondering maid Becky gave way, overwrought by her long journey and careless of what the other would think.

"I—I just *can't,* Lucile! I'm not used—used to all these things—and I'm perfectly able to do things myself—and—and——"

"Never mind, Becky dear!" soothed Lucile in perfect comprehension. "Now *do* stop crying or your eyes'll look just horrid. I'll help you myself if you'd rather."

"They're all used to guests having such fine things," replied Becky, whose outburst had relieved her immensely. "They'd laugh at my clothes and I'd feel uncomfortable all the time. Just let me be as I've always been; I'm not used to being waited on so much and—and I won't

have it!" She ended up with a little stamp of her foot that drew a laugh from Lucile.

"All right, Captain! Now go and freshen up; I hear your trunk coming upstairs. Here's the bathroom, all your own. I'll wait for you."

Becky fled with her hostess to the shelter of a tiny bathroom opening off her room and Lucile left her there. Loosening her waist, Becky hastily dabbed at her face and removed the traces of tears. Then, freshened after her journey, she returned into the room at Lucile's cheery hail.

"Coast's clear, Becky! Hurry up, now!"

The men had unstrapped the trunk and Becky had only to unlock it and throw open the top.

"Here's a plain white one," she began, taking out the dress on top. "Would this do?"

"Oh, it's a dear!" cried Lucile as Becky shook it out and held it up for inspection. "Just the thing! Slip into it, quick now!"

So, with Lucile assisting, Becky got out of her traveling suit and into the plain white dress. As she fastened her collar Lucile stood off in undisguised admiration.

"Why, Becky, it seems just *made* for you! Did you get it in New York?"

"Not much!" laughed Becky happily. "I made it myself—mother and I did; that is, also the

seamstress, only I designed it. Do you really like it, or is it just blarney?"

"Blarney?" echoed Lucile. "I should say not! There's something about it, whether it's the design or the shoulders or what, that just seems to fit you and nobody else. Do you know, I believe that you have a positive genius. I wish you'd help with some of my dresses."

"I'd be glad to," laughed Becky. "There! Now I'm all ready, thanks to you."

Arm in arm the two girls left the room. But Becky little imagined how important a bearing that conversation was to have on her future, as she descended the broad stairway with her friend.

Becky had only time to glance around the big living room, full of comfortable leather-cushioned chairs with a large round table littered with magazines, when the stately James announced dinner. Once settled around the glittering table, the whole family combined to make the guest feel perfectly at home and succeeded so well that Becky soon forgot all about Briggs.

"I called up Jack Humphrey," announced Schuyler eagerly. "Billy was there with him—they just got in from the city. Jack said they'd come over in the car to-night, sure."

"How far away is their place?" asked Becky.

" 'Bout four miles down the line. Billy's folks

have a cottage over at the lake but he's stayin' with Jack just now.''

The meal passed off gayly between stories of New York, tales of life on the farm and at Sunapee Lake and reminiscences of Florida and the *Olivette*. Then Mr. Hatton lit his cigar and they adjourned to the living room, which connected with the library. Lucile and Becky snuggled down into the depths of a big sofa and as they did so came four quick blares of a horn from without.

''There's Dusty,'' exclaimed Schuyler, hastily making for the door. ''Never mind, James. I'll let 'em in.''

''Mother doesn't like us to call him 'Dusty,' '' explained Lucile as her brother vanished into the hall, ''but we forget sometimes.''

A moment later two grinning boys clad in gray dust-coats appeared in the doorway. At the sight of the first one Becky gave a gasp of dismay and shrank back; but Lucile pulled her up with a laugh.

''Hello, boys! Miss Beckwith, this is Billy Dustin—Jack Humphrey, Miss Beckwith! There, —after that I guess you can stick to Dusty and Hump and Becky, in private. Why, what's the matter?''

Becky had advanced with outstretched hand and an extremely innocent expression. That candid,

open-eyed innocence was her court of last resort, because in the first boy she had recognized the red-haired hero of her train adventure, and his companion was the other. Billy's confident grin had frozen into a horrified stare and Jack began to back abruptly toward the door when Lucile noticed the situation.

"Why—why, I—I thought maybe we'd met—met before," stammered Billy lamely as he took Becky's hand.

"I think you must be mistaken," answered that young lady very coolly, smiling her sweetest. "But I'm very glad to meet you. And this is Jack Humphrey? Schuyler was telling us that you two returned from New York to-day; why, we must have been on the same train."

"Well, make yourselves at home, everybody!" commanded Mr. Hatton cordially when the two visitors had shaken hands all around and delivered their coats and caps to James. Billy's grin had returned by this time, although Jack kept remarkably silent and there was a glint in the eye of the red-haired boy that Becky did not like. It was explained when Billy's blue eyes met hers with a glance of defiance.

"So you're from Chicago?" he said. "Wasn't there a western boy at school first semester, Jack?"

"I believe so," and Humphrey's eyes lit up as he comprehended. "He was from Chicago or Omaha or Denver or somewhere. I remember he flunked everything and got fired."

Becky gasped at this barefaced attack and before she could reply Billy had hurried on.

"Oh, well, you prob'ly didn't know him anyhow. Say, Hump an' I had a peach of a blowout last week, Sky! We took Ted Herron and his folks down to the steamer—they went by the *Mauretania,* Lucile—an' Ted missed the boat, so we went to the show. Real bangup play, too; Sir Maxwell Hanson in 'The Elect,' just over from London. Did you ever see it, Miss—er—Beckwith?"

Becky was furious, despite her wide-eyed expression. Ruth had gone to bed; Mr. and Mrs. Hatton were oblivious of anything beneath the surface; Lucile was looking slightly puzzled but a dark flush was slowly creeping into Schuyler's cheeks as he began to realize whither his chum's remarks were tending.

"Oh, no," came Becky's reply, sweet as ever, "I don't think that they'd allow *that* kind of a play to be given in Chicago, Mr.—er—Dusty."

In the laugh that arose at her mimicry, Mrs. Hatton looked up in a rather peculiar manner.

"Billy Dustin, do you mean to say that you and Jack would go to see such a play——"

"Why, Mrs. Hatton!" he protested in dismay. "The play was all right! It—it——"

"Oh, I didn't mean anything like that," explained Becky in her most innocent manner. "I meant that it wasn't quite—well, *intellectual* enough for Chicago."

Billy glared, then his face relaxed into its usual grin and Becky knew that her shot had told. Just as he tried to reply, however, Schuyler jumped into the breach with a surprising question.

CHAPTER IV

RESTEASY FARM

"What do you think Michigan'll do this fall, Dusty?"

"Football?" queried Billy, surprised. "Why, I don't know."

"She's got a fine schedule," exclaimed Becky with a grateful glance at her rescuer. "Pennsylvania and Carlisle and a probable game with Princeton."

"We don't know anything about Michigan," protested Jack rather sulkily. "But——"

"Well, you'd better wake up!" cried Schuyler heatedly. "Say, Becky, isn't Chicago coming east?"

"Game with Cornell," nodded Becky, "and a track meet with Yale, I believe."

"She ought to clean up on Yale, now Bob Gardner's gone."

"Yes, he was a star, wasn't he? A Chicago boy, too!"

Lucile, waking up to the situation at last, was

listening with an amused smile. Schuyler had no intention of letting up on his chum, however.

"You ought to take a trip out that way, Billy. When I went to St. Louis with dad last year we saw some of the finest agricultural colleges ever. Tell you what, they're worth seeing."

"That's so," chipped in Mr. Hatton, looking over his magazine with sudden interest. "I was looking up ways and means then—just after buying this place, you know—and I was surprised at what we found. You'd better get up to date, boys, and read up on those Middle State places. They're doing big work all the time."

"Why, I thought everyone knew all about them!" exclaimed Becky in surprise.

"Couldn't we have some music, Lucile?" asked Billy hastily.

Lucile was about to refuse, for she was enjoying the confusion of her two visitors too much to end it, when she caught an imperceptible nod from Becky and with a laughing assent led the way to the music room.

Becky followed her and as she passed Billy in the doorway she caught a faint apologetic whisper from him.

"Call it off, now, and I'll be good!"

"All right," she smiled, waiting until Lucile turned on the lights, "but be careful or I'll tell

how you were running errands for me on the train."

There was no chance to say more but judging by Billy's face that was quite enough. The music room opened off the library. There was a large square piano, a phonograph of the most expensive type and the room itself seemed to Becky like a concert hall.

"We thought we might have a musicale or two later on," explained Lucile as she opened the piano, "but father hadn't figured on the scarcity of people around here, I guess. Get your dance records ready, Sky."

The latter, with a triumphant grin at Becky, did so. After Lucile had played a popular song or two, Schuyler and Billy attended to the machine and an impromptu dance was held. The breach slowly healed between Becky and the visitors, at least on the surface, and the girl betrayed nothing of the mortification and shame that was burning in her heart until the two boys had departed, with noisy farewells, to their car. Schuyler went out with them, while Becky returned to the music room for her handkerchief. Here Lucile found her a moment later.

"Why, Becky dear! Whatever is the matter?"

"It's that Billy—Dustin," sobbed Becky.

"They think—I'm a baby—and don't know anything—'cause I'm from Chicago—and——"

"Nonsense!" Lucile turned out the lights lest Schuyler come on them unawares — and took Becky in her arms. "Now you've got to stop being such a foolish little girl"—she was a good inch shorter than Becky—"and just be sensible for once! Why, I don't see anything to cry about. You and Schuyler just knocked Dusty silly, and Jack too. I'm sorry I asked them over, anyhow."

"They're all right," returned Becky. "It's my fault, I guess." And she told Lucile of her adventure on the train with Billy. "It's all because I was a little afraid of them, you see. I never will be again, though. Billy thought he could scare me or bluff me out of saying anything, but it's all over now."

"Well, I guess it isn't!" exclaimed Lucile hotly. "I'm going to tell them just what I think of them! I supposed it was all a joke——"

"Now don't do that!" cried Becky in alarm. "Billy called it all off and we made up. You'll see, he'll be just as nice as can be after to-night. I felt a little—a little foolish, I guess." Becky mopped her eyes with what was left of her handkerchief and sprang up with a laugh. "Come on! We're all right now! I'm about ready for bed, too."

As she was about to go to her room, Mr. Hatton called to her from his private study adjoining the library. Becky went in, and found him seated at his desk, on which lay a pile of cards.

"I just wanted to show you these, Becky," said Mr. Hatton as he handed her one of them. "I like to get these out myself and the children like them."

On all the cards was a little pen and ink sketch, in some droll conception, of a horse and rider; beneath was a printed form with blanks filled in by hand.

RACES!

The usual races will be held on Thursday, August 5th, at the Resteasy Track, at which your presence is commanded under pain of one penny forfeit. Two o'clock sharp. Lunch will be served at five. Prizes awarded by the Judge.

EGBERT HATTON.

"What do you think of it?"

"It's fine!" cried Becky, delighted. "And the cute little picture is perfectly dear. May I keep this?"

"Do," replied Mr. Hatton. "Consider it your invitation, if you like. And now off to bed; you've had a hard day, I fear, and should not have danced this evening."

"Oh, yes, I should!" laughed Becky and bade

him good night. She was tired, however; too tired to fall asleep at once. As she lay in bed, the events of the day recurred to her with startling distinctness. When she thought of Billy and Jack she smiled to herself; then her old fears and doubtings overcame her and she had a quiet little cry, in the midst of which she must have fallen asleep, for she woke to find the sun streaming in on her.

This, the first day of her visit, was one of undreamed of wonders. After breakfast Mr. Hatton claimed Becky for the morning. Taking a small runabout electric, which he drove himself, he showed her the whole farm, or rather estate, consisting of thousands of acres. The greater part of it was devoted to fancy stock raising. One thickly wooded portion was being stocked as a game preserve.

There were buildings of all kinds. The "cottage" itself was lighted from a central electric plant which supplied power to all the barns and workmen's cottages, which formed a small village in themselves. The pony farm and race track formed a separate portion of the estate and Becky went into wild delight over the ponies.

"There are about two hundred," explained Mr. Hatton as they stopped to look at a herd. "Most of them are Shetlands and all are of the best breed. Hello, Prince!"

A pretty little Shetland with flowing brown mane trotted up quite fearlessly to the machine and stuck its nose into Becky's hand.

"Looking for sugar, eh?" laughed Mr. Hatton. "Prince is Lucile's own pony, Becky."

"He's a darling!" cried Becky excitedly, stroking the pony's nose a trifle timidly. "They're all beauties, every one. May I ride one to-morrow?"

For the moment she had forgotten that she could not ride. But Mr. Hatton's reply quickly brought her around.

"Of course. Everyone picks out their own mount from the herd, so there's no favoritism. They'll all be looking forward to seeing the girl from the Wild West give quite an exhibition, too. There's a nice set of beauty-pins up as prize on the girls' race, so you'd better ride to win."

"But, Mr. Hatton!" gasped Becky with a sudden impulse born of desperation. "I can't ride! I never rode in all my life!"

"What?" Mr. Hatton stared at her a moment and then burst into a laugh. And not only that, but he kept it up, roar on roar, until Prince scampered away insulted and poor Becky shrank back with very mixed feelings.

"I beg your pardon," cried her host at length, wiping his eyes, "but you don't know the joke. You see Schuyler has been filling Billy and Jack

and the rest of the crowd with all kinds of tales about you. Whenever he couldn't think of anything else he'd fall back on his imagination. Among other things he told them a lot about your riding and of course they spread it around. Oh, it'll teach Sky a lesson!" And he went off into another fit of laughter which Becky interrupted very suddenly and determinedly.

"Look here, Mr. Hatton! I'm going to ride in that race to-morrow and don't you tell anyone that I can't ride. I just won't be made fun of any more by Billy Dustin and Jack—and, anyway, the joke would be on me and not on Sky. I guess it isn't much of a trick to ride those ponies. I can hang on if anybody else can. Now you won't say anything, will you?"

"Why, of course not." Mr. Hatton glanced at her flushed face and anxious eyes with a lingering smile. "But I don't want you to get thrown and hurt, you know."

"Oh, you needn't worry. I can hang on when I get going," laughed Becky resolutely.

"Well, it's nearly luncheon time," returned Mr. Hatton as he threw in the clutch. "I'll pick out a pony myself for you, Becky, when the time comes —and mind that you don't let anyone else do it."

Becky assented happily, not quite sure of his

meaning, and a few minutes later they had returned to the house.

"I think you're mean!" cried Lucile to her father. "You took Becky off for the whole morning when I'm just dying to show her my new dresses and things."

"She cares more about seeing a real live up-to-date farm and some of the finest Shetlands in the country than she does about a lot of dress things, don't you, Captain?" laughed Mr. Hatton.

"No-o, I'm not sure that I do," retorted Becky as she climbed out of the runabout. "But it's all perfectly glorious, Mr. Hatton. I never imagined that a farm away up here in the hills could be like this. You won't forget your promise, will you?"

"About to-morrow? Of course not."

"What promise?" inquired Lucile, pausing with her arm about Becky's waist.

"Oh," laughed Becky slyly, "that's a secret between me and your father! Come on, I'm almost famished."

Becky had been a little dubious about her middy waist and P. T., but to her delight she found that Lucile wore nothing else around the farm. It was the very thing, declared her friends, especially for trips to Lake Sunapee, and she could hardly believe that Becky's was homemade.

"My dear!" she cried, as she helped in the post-

poned unpacking of her guest's trunk, "how on earth do you do it? Here my suits are made by P. T. himself and yet there's something about yours—well, I want you to look at my new party dress right after luncheon and tell me what's wrong with it."

"I'll be glad to," laughed Becky. "But you give me too much credit. Anybody can fix dresses right."

"No they can't," asserted Lucile. "My new one cost ninety-five dollars and it looks like a fright. I don't know what's the matter and Madame Picquet said it was 'ab-so-lute-ly a dream, my dear!' But it's off somewhere."

So, right after luncheon Lucile carried Becky off to her room, much to the disgust of Schuyler. She got out the new dress and Becky, who never had the slightest thought of envy in her make-up, went into ecstasies over it. But when Lucile tried it on, the Chicago girl could see at once what her friend had meant.

"I don't know what it is," said Becky, frowning as she walked around the other, "but it doesn't seem to just—Oh, I do too know. Take it off, quick. Where are the scissors? And the pins?"

Careless of everything but her idea, Becky slashed recklessly at the skirt for a few minutes.

Then Lucile put it on again and submitted to a series of trials, after which Becky rose from her knees in triumph.

"There, now look at it! All it needed was to have that bottom flounce taken out and put in an inch lower down."

"Why, that's ever so much better," cried Lucile admiringly. "It was just the one thing needed, Becky dear. How *did* you know?"

"I just guessed," confessed Becky happily.

"I'll have Briggs go to work on it right away," declared Lucile, "and it'll be done in no time. You're a dear!"

"Now I've got to write a note home," said Becky. "I should have done it last night."

"Come along to the library. Everything's there. Just fasten this hook—there we are!"

When Becky was left alone in the library, with pen and ink and paper before her, she sat staring at the bookcases around her for a long time.

"No, I won't say a word except about what's nice," she concluded. "And goodness knows there's enough to say about that!"

Then she bent over the paper and wrote furiously for half an hour, telling about all she had seen and part of what she had done. When at length she folded and sealed the letter, there was a new light in her eyes.

"I guess other folks have to put up with a lot from me," she was thinking, "so I'll make up my mind to put up with a lot from them. And I'll be so nice to those boys that they'll feel mean!"

Had she known how soon her resolutions were to be tested, and how severely, she might not have been in such a happy frame of mind.

CHAPTER V

AT THE RACES

"Say, Captain! I want to tip you off to something."

It was one thirty o'clock and Becky stood out in the warm sunshine on the wide front porch waiting for Lucile and Mrs. Hatton to start for the races. Behind her was Schuyler advancing eagerly from the door.

"Why isn't anyone here?" asked Becky, wrinkling her brows in surprise. "I thought there'd be a crowd."

"There will be—at the track," was the boy's reply. "They meet there and come over here later. Now look here, Becky. You're going in the girls' race?"

"I suppose so," smiled Becky.

"Well, Lucile means to win it," said Schuyler shortly. "You've got to beat her to it. She's a peach of a rider, too. She means all right, but—well, she's got a notion that you're some rider, o' course. I just wanted to put you next—I hope you'll beat her a mile! So long." And Schuyler was off to the stables.

Becky looked after him with a wry little smile. So Lucile was going to beat her! In that moment Becky determined that she would ride if she died for it. And there was bitterness in her heart, too, but not for long. She was far too generous not to make wide allowance for the shortcomings of her friends and she resolved to make Lucile happy at the cost of her own pride. Her reflections were cut short by the appearance of Lucile and her mother, together with that of the runabout driven by Louis.

"It's a nuisance to use the machine," exclaimed Lucile with a pout, "but we'll be glad enough to have it coming home. It's nearly half a mile to the track, isn't it, mother?"

"More nearly a mile, Lucile," answered Mrs. Hatton, who always took a keen interest in the races. Within a few moments they arrived at the track and Becky found it very different from what it had been the day before.

The paddock was full of ponies, as was the track itself. Many, just from the stables, were blanketed, and grooms led them in groups of two and three while a crowd of young people inspected them. Behind the miniature grand stand and lined up along the track were a score of motor cars and a number of dog-carts. The whole scene was alive with color and noisy with the delight of

children and young folks. One riotous group headed by Billy and Schuyler hailed the runabout with a yell of greeting as it rolled up. Mr. Hatton hastened forward to help out his wife.

A crowd of girls and boys gathered about the runabout and Becky was introduced to one after another. There were so many that she could not begin to remember them all. One in particular struck her by her dark hair, sparkling black eyes and tomboy manner. She was not surprised to be introduced to Wilhelmina Humphrey, Jack's sister. Then Billy and Schuyler charged down and carried off Becky to introduce her to the boys and the ponies.

Barely had she shaken hands with the last boy when three deep notes of the bell came from the miniature judges' stand, where Mr. and Mrs. Hatton had taken their places. The former always acted as starter and judge and now through a megaphone he announced the races.

"Two o'clock. First race is for girls under fourteen. Prizes, silver belt pin and box of candy. Choose your mounts. Clear the track!"

Instantly the grooms began leading the ponies off the track, and a number of shrieking, excited girls descended upon them. As fast as the ponies were chosen they were led away to be saddled and bridled, and a moment later two or three of

the smaller girls dashed out eagerly on their steeds. Becky had been too absorbed in watching the busy scene to heed anything else and, as she looked around, she found Billy at her side.

"Peach of a day, ain't it?" he began, in an embarrassed manner.

"Fine!" she answered, heartily. "Aren't those ponies too cute for anything?"

"Not so bad," agreed Billy. "Goin' to ride?"

"I don't know yet," said Becky, cautiously. "I suppose so."

"Girls' race comes last," volunteered Jack, who had joined them with Schuyler and Lucile. "Billy's goin' in, too."

"Billy?" queried Becky, in surprise.

"He's talkin' about his sister, not me," chuckled Dusty. "Don't get us mixed up, Captain Becky."

"All right; I'll try not to—Dusty," retorted Becky, with a laugh. "Hello!"

While they had been chatting, the entries had been made and now, with a tap of the bell, Mr. Hatton read off the list. The grooms at the ponies' heads lined them up. Then came one sharp stroke of the bell and a shout arose from the watchers.

"They're off!" yelled Dusty. "Push out, Helen! That's the idea!"

"Let him out, Freda!" cried Jack, amid the babel of cheers and blowing of horns that went up. For a few moments the half-dozen smaller girls who were riding kept in a bunch halfway around the track. Then they swiftly drew apart. One after another fell behind until only two were left neck and neck at the last quarter. Then Helen Hunt, a particular friend of Ruth's, came dashing in for first prize. Ruth herself took no part in the races as yet, but sat gravely beside her father in the judges' stand.

"They have one heat for the little races," explained "Billy" Humphrey, joining the group and standing beside Becky. "Are you going in with Lucile and me?"

"Why, I'll try it," replied Becky, stoutly enough, but with no little trepidation now that she was actually on the scene.

"Ever play tennis?"

"I love it!" declared Becky, enthusiastically. Indeed, tennis was the one sport wherein she felt at home.

"Dandy! Hey, Jack, Sky—come over here."

At the imperious tone in Billy's voice, the boys crowded around. Mr. Hatton had just awarded the prizes and the track was being

cleared for the next race, which was to be for smaller boys.

"Dusty," ordered his fair cousin, regally, "where's that silver cup you got to put up for the tennis tournament last month. It rained, you know, and everything was called off."

"It's around somewhere. Why?" returned Dusty.

"Well, look it up to-night. Get it shined up by to-morrow afternoon. Lucile, Becky, Jack, Dusty, Sky and me—that's six—are to have a tournament to-morrow afternoon, over at the club."

"Make it to-morrow morning," cried Lucile. "Then we'll come over for the day and try Dusty's new motor boat."

"Fine!" declared Billy. "Sky, you an' Becky play together. Jack, you take Lucile, an' Dusty'll take me."

"Well, I like your nerve!" cried Dusty, but with a laugh that showed he did not dislike the plan so very much. Becky was amused at Schuyler's wink of delight and surprised at the way in which Billy ordered everyone else around. The conversation was interrupted, however, by the starting of the second race for boys.

When this was over Mr. Hatton announced a free-for-all hurdle race, and grooms moved out

with miniature hurdles which were placed in position along the track. This race was unexpected and Billy promptly dashed off with the intention of entering.

"What's the prize?" asked Schuyler, eagerly. "Tennis racket? Me for it!"

He was followed by Dusty, but Jack preferred to wait until the next race, which would be for larger boys. Instead of heats, it was now arranged that each race would be run four times around the track, as a dispute had arisen between two of the visitors about their mounts for the second heat of the hurdle race, and Mr. Hatton wished to avoid anything of the kind.

The entries for the hurdles consisted of Billy, Schuyler, Dusty and three others whose names Becky could not remember and could not hear as they were read off. A tennis racket was the first prize; second, a silver desk set, and third, a fine Scotch knit four-in-hand suitable for either girl or boy.

"Watch Billy get laid out flat," chuckled Jack, as he saw his sister appear on a black pony. "Dusty an' Sky'll knock the spots out of her."

"No, they won't," asserted Lucile, indignantly. "She's got my pony; you just wait!"

"Won't she be too tired to go in our race?"

ventured Becky. She was already thinking of it as "ours," but Lucile did not notice the slip.

"Tired!" laughed Jack. "Why, Billy can stand anything! She can tire out me or any of the fellows."

Becky subsided and gave her attention to the race. Twice the ponies came under the wire in a clump and twice Mr. Hatton sent them back with three strokes. Then came a well lined up dash and with one sharp tap of the bell the race was on.

As the ponies swept past the first quarter, grooms hastily put out hurdles, for none had been placed until the half and there were three more rounds of the track. Up went the first rider and Jack sent up a yell of delight.

"Sky's ahead! Dusty's right behind!"

"Come on, Billy!" shouted Becky, recognizing her new friend among the foremost. Hurdle after hurdle was taken and when the ponies darted into the homestretch she saw that Schuyler and Dusty were tied for first place; another boy was second and Wilhelmina was behind with the bunch. These quickly scattered during the second round, however, leaving Dusty first, the other boy second and Schuyler and Wilhelmina tied for third.

The third heat sent the crowd into mad excitement, even the grooms joining in the cheers.

Wilhelmina had cleverly crowded Schuyler into the fence, forcing him to fall back, and as the riders bobbed up over the last hurdle she swept even with the second boy. So they remained until the half was reached again. Then Becky saw Wilhelmina's whip flirt out, the black pony forge ahead and she was even with Dusty at the three-quarters. Down swept the ponies into the homestretch and, at almost the last moment, Wilhelmina swept off her hat, flapped it across her pony's hindquarters with a yell and beat Dusty by a neck.

"Come on, Becky!" cried Lucile, excitedly. "We've got to get our ponies now. Billy's used mine up, so I'll have to take another."

"I'll pick out one for you, Becky," urged Jack, suddenly, and he darted away before the girls could stop him. Becky followed Lucile to the paddock and stood helpless amidst the thronging grooms and crowding ponies. A moment later Schuyler appeared, flushed and dusty.

"Well, I lost all right that time," he said, rather sheepishly. "Hello! You're in the next, ain't you? Got a pony?"

Becky hesitated, and as she did so Jack appeared, leading a cream-colored Shetland.

"Here's just what you want, Becky!" he ex-

claimed. "He's a peach—he can run away from everything here."

Becky looked at the pony, saw a swift glance of surprise flit over Schuyler's face and caught an almost imperceptible shake of the latter's head. At the same moment a voice fell on her ears.

"Ah, here you are, Captain!" Whirling around, she saw Mr. Hatton, followed by a groom and pony. "What are you doing with that mount, Jack?" came his sharp question. Jack looked confused.

"Why, Becky wanted a pony, an' Fury's the best kind——"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Hatton. "Becky, here's your mount and you'll find him all right. Get him saddled, Jim. Now, no more tricks like that, young man, unless you want to be disbarred!"

As Mr. Hatton returned to the stand Jack vanished hastily. Schuyler winked at the bewildered Becky and had only time for a hasty word before Lucile rejoined them.

"He was slipping one over on you, Cap. Fury's an awful beast—I wouldn't have let you take her, anyhow."

"All ready, Becky?" exclaimed Lucile.

"Pretty near, thanks!" But, although she appeared quite calm, Becky was desperately

unhappy inwardly and nerved herself to the ordeal with all her power. So Jack had tried to give her a vicious pony! She remembered suddenly that Billy Dustin had been whispering earnestly to his cousin just before the hurdle race, with frequent glances at her. So that was it! As the groom approached with her pony Becky mentally resolved to pay off Dusty before very long.

Schuyler helped her into the saddle and gave her a last word of encouragement as she sat there, a queer, helpless feeling in her heart.

"Hey, Jim! Loosen these stirrups an' let 'em down. Now, Becky, most of us ride Eastern fashion, high-stirrup; but that's a reg'lar cowboy saddle you got there—picked it out myself. There, your stirrups are down just right. Grip tight with your knees. Good luck, Cap!"

Then the groom led her out onto the track—and everything became a blur to poor Becky. Dimly she heard Mr. Hatton read off her name and Lucile's and announce that Wilhelmina was barred, having won one race already. Then came the bell and she felt her pony swing in beside Lucile's. Another bell stroke, and a great yell completely finished her bewilderment.

She realized nothing except that she was holding on grimly to the reins and saddle-pommel.

Then she loosened her grip on the latter, determined not to appear any more ridiculous than she had to. Oddly enough, she thought, she was still even with Lucile as they swept for the first time into the homestretch. A new burst of yells and horns sounded in her ears as the stand and paddock flashed by. Then everything drifted behind again.

Twice more they passed the crowd and not until the third time did Becky wake up. She regained her senses and self-command as she heard a sharp yell from Schuyler.

"Last lap, Cap! You got her! Shoot away!"

Why, she was still even with Lucile! Suddenly "finding" herself, Becky leaned over and urged on her pony. The result sent her a length ahead and she heard a quick gasp from Lucile, just behind. A wild thrill of exultation surged through Becky's heart. She, who had never ridden before, was actually winning! She was beating Lucile at her own game!

CHAPTER VI

BECKY EVENS UP

But even as she flicked down her quirt Becky remembered. Lucile wanted to win. They were at the half now and she felt a wild impulse to sweep ahead recklessly; but Lucile had set her heart on winning and, as Becky's generosity returned, her swift exultation ebbed. She had promised herself to let Lucile win, and she would.

With a new and close grip she set her hands on the reins. Slowly she drew in the pony's head. More and more Lucile came up as they rounded the three-quarters, until as the homestretch loomed ahead Becky forced her mount back and Lucile was a length ahead. At the paddock Becky loosened her grip and urged on her pony, but Lucile swept under the wire a half-length ahead.

"The East wins!" yelled Jack, darting out and grabbing Lucile's bridle triumphantly as the excited crowd overflowed the track and the grooms came for the ponies. As Becky slipped to the ground she heard an angry whisper in her ear.

"What'd you throw that race for?"

She turned to find Schuyler at her side. The others were crowding about the winner, who was going to the stand to receive the prize.

"I—I was scared," gasped Becky, rather faintly.

"Is that the truth?" urged Schuyler, hotly, his eyes aflame.

"Well, everyone expected Lucile to win—it wasn't anything to me—I couldn't help it," stammered Becky, becoming confused as she felt her temples flush. "I didn't want to disappoint Hump, either."

"Hump!" echoed Schuyler. "Why, *I* wanted *you* to win! I reckon my disappointment don't count."

"I didn't know you cared about it," protested Becky, earnestly. "Anyway, don't tell on me, Sky. I didn't mean to do it—I just couldn't help it!"

"Ho! I thought Western girls could ride," laughed Jack, as he and the rest crowded around.

"She was scared," defended Schuyler, "and I don't blame her."

"Pretty good for your first ride, Captain!" exclaimed Mr. Hatton, as he pushed through the crowd and seized Becky's hand. A questioning shout went up at his words and as Becky's blush confirmed the statement Lucile put an arm around her waist quickly.

"Why, we didn't know that, Becky!" cried Lucile. "I never thought——" She was interrupted by Wilhelmina, who seized the hand Mr. Hatton dropped.

"Shake, Captain Becky! Say, we all thought you were an old hand—honest! If you play tennis like you can ride we'll all get cleaned up tomorrow, eh, Dusty?"

"I guess that's right," grinned the red-haired boy. There was no more time for talk, as they were swept out of the track. Five minutes later a long string of motors and dog-carts wound its way toward the house, whose grounds were ornamented with Japanese lanterns.

Here, after quickly changing her clothes, Becky spent one of the happiest evenings she had ever known. A substantial supper was served outdoors and when the younger members of the party had been sent home in charge of their grooms and parents, the older ones adjourned to the music room for a dance. Between times it was arranged that Billy and Jack were to call for Schuyler, Lucile and Becky the next morning with the Humphreys' car and take them over to the lake, where Dusty would meet them, as the Dustin cottage was on the lake itself.

When Becky crept into bed that night she was so tired that she had little time for reflection. Her

slight bitterness had wholly vanished. She had won her place and as she fell asleep she had only a feeling of contented happiness with everything and everybody—except Dusty.

Jack and his sister were to call at eight, which was unusually early for Lucile, but not for Becky. At seven the young people were up for a hasty breakfast, after which Lucile fitted Becky out with her best racket, and promptly on time the big red roadster rolled up the drive with Jack at the wheel.

The morning was magnificent. The air was clear and cool, and all around them hung the blue shadows of the mountains. Jack and Schuyler were in front, with the three girls in the tonneau, and now Becky got her first taste of real speeding.

"How far is it to the club?" she asked, between bounces.

"Ten or twelve miles," replied Billy, calmly. "We've done it in fifteen minutes when no one blocked the road. Let her out, Jack!"

And Jack "let her out" as soon as they gained the main road. Becky gave one gasp and then held her breath, expecting every minute that something would happen. But nothing did. The road led among the hills, but Jack never slackened speed except for turns. There seemed to be no one

on the road; indeed, the desolate beauty of the scenery impressed the Chicago girl greatly.

There were no closely settled farms such as she was used to. Occasionally they would pass an old farmhouse, apparently fighting against the rocks and scrubby trees for its bare existence, but signs of life were not many. Then they darted around a corner and before them lay Sunapee Lake, sparkling in the sunshine. There were several boats in sight, the edges of the lake were sprinkled with cottages and farms and the scene reminded Becky of the Michigan and Wisconsin resorts which she had visited in other years.

"There's the club," cried Lucile, pointing to a group of low buildings on a little point of land ahead.

"An' there's Dusty's boat," added Schuyler, excitedly, pointing to a long, thin shape cutting through the water near the club docks. Jack tooted the horn as they descended the hill, and a faint shriek came back from Dusty's siren as the boat turned in. Then they were at the club.

While they waited for Jack to return from the garage, Becky looked around with eager interest. The clubhouse was a low, square building with a wide veranda, and was surrounded by boathouses and other structures. A group of gayly dressed people, followed by caddies, waved at them as they

departed for the golf links. Behind the clubhouse were half a dozen tennis courts, only one of which was not taken by flannel-clad players. Wilhelmina instantly made a dash for this.

"You wait for Jack an' Dusty," she called. "I'm goin' to hold that court before Van Blount comes. I just saw him——" and the rest was lost as Billy dashed off.

"She can't keep still," laughed Lucile, happily. "I wish I had her go."

"You have," cried Schuyler, "only it doesn't show. Hello, Dusty! Got the cup?"

Dusty greeted them with his usual cheerful grin and for the moment Becky forgot that she had a score to settle with him. He produced a silver cup five inches high from the depths of a flannel bag.

"Ain't she a beaut?" he exclaimed. "I might as well keep it, though, 'cause Billy an' I'll win it."

"No, you won't!" asserted Lucile, wresting the cup from his hands suddenly. "Hey! Mr. Van!"

A tall, languid youth in cream flannels was just emerging on the club veranda. At Lucile's cry he turned and descended the steps.

"Hello, folks!" he drawled. "Er—I beg your pardon!"

"Miss Beckwith, Mr. Van Blount," exclaimed

Lucile, promptly. "Say, Van, you've lost your chance at the last court because Billy's holding it for us. We've got a tournament on. Act as judge, will you?"

"Why, gladly!" Van Blount seemed rather staggered at this direct attack. He had the air of being too bored to move fast, and Becky caught an appreciative grin from Schuyler as Lucile thrust the cup into his hands.

"Come along," exclaimed Dusty. "No use wasting time. Who'll go first?"

"Becky and I'll play Lucile an' Hump," called Schuyler, pulling off his coat as they went along. "You an' Billy can wait. Three out of four sets. You play the winners an' the two last girls play for the cup. That suit you?"

As all agreed promptly, Van Blount took his seat on the judge's stand with paper and pencil, while the others extracted their rackets from the cases.

"Don't the boys have any show at the cup?" asked Becky, in surprise.

"No, we don't count," grinned Jack. "We're just here to fill up the vacant places." But when the proposed plan was told to Billy, she disagreed very decisively.

"Becky an' Schuyler play Lucile an' Jack," she ordered. "Then Dusty and I'll play 'em. If

we both beat them, then Becky an' Sky can play us for the cup. That's fairer.''

So it was agreed and Becky walked out on the smoothly rolled court with her partner, who ordered her to play forward. This stroke of genius pitted her against Jack and rather disconcerted Lucile, so that Becky and Schuyler beat them three straight sets and retired to rest.

Becky soon saw that Lucile was not in it compared to Billy Humphrey, who was an even better player than Dusty. Jack, however, made it hot for his sister and won two out of the five sets, which retired him and Lucile from all hope of the cup. As Billy scorned to take a rest, Becky caught up her racket again and took the field, Schuyler playing forward this time against Dusty. Van Blount tossed down fresh balls to Billy, the first server, and the match was on.

This time Becky had to work for all she was worth. Billy seemed to cover the whole back court with amazing quickness, sending ball after ball just inside Becky's back line and keeping her purely on the defensive. Time after time the score went back to forty all, then Schuyler sent the ball into the net and lost the first game. When Van Blount announced that the first set had gone to Billy and Dusty, score 6-3, Schuyler approached Becky as they changed courts.

"You play up against Dusty," he said. "I can handle Billy, an' Dusty's scared o' you."

"All right," nodded Becky. "I'll make him scareder yet before we get through!"

But Dusty did not look scared in the least as Becky faced him and the second set resolved itself into a battle between the two forward players. Time after time a cheer went up from the group of watchers behind Lucile and Jack as Dusty and Becky volleyed back and forth, but Schuyler's words proved true. Dusty lost two games through inexcusable errors; Schuyler sent a twister through Billy for another, making the games stand three all. Then Becky dropped a teaser over the net that Dusty failed to return. The honors finally broke even with a set apiece.

In the third set Dusty recovered his brilliancy and played for Schuyler instead of Becky. By this strategy the latter couple only won two games out of the set.

"Now we've got to work," said the perspiring Schuyler, as they changed courts for the next set. "Two to our one. We've got to win two straight sets, Cap!"

"Maybe I'd better play back?" suggested Becky.

"Not on your life!" returned Schuyler, grimly.

"Dusty'll lose his nerve again pretty quick. You're all right."

As Becky took her place she determined that Dusty should not play through her this time. A sudden idea came to her and she glanced over at the red-haired boy with a smile.

"Here's where I pay you back for that pony deal yesterday, Dusty!" she said in a low voice. Her opponent's face lost its cheerful grin and he started to speak, but had no chance, for Becky returned Billy's ball straight at Dusty. The boy struck confusedly and sent the ball into the next court.

"Don't get scared; I won't hurt you," continued Becky. This completely unnerved the other, who could not imagine how Becky knew of the "pony deal," and angrily determined to pay Jack out for telling on him, as he thought. His playing became so ragged that Billy called him to account sharply time and again, but Dusty could do nothing. They only won a single game out of the six and, as the courts were changed, Dusty received a tongue-lashing from the angry Billy that completed his demoralization.

"Hooray!" yelled Schuyler, flinging up his racket wildly as Becky sent the winning ball at Dusty, who promptly ducked and let it fly. "Good for you, Cap! Hooray!"

"Score, three to two, in favor of Miss Beckwith and Mr. Hatton," announced Van Blount in his bored drawl. "Miss Beckwith will now play Miss Humphrey, best two out of three sets, for the cup."

There was a brief rest before the finals, during which Dusty and Jack had a heated argument off to one side. Becky chuckled as she watched them disputing and resolved to seize the first chance to make friends with Dusty and end the good-natured feud that had arisen between them. She really liked the cheerful, freckled-faced, impulsive boy, and knew that he was only fighting desperately in the defense of his own wounded vanity. She was kept too busy to do it now, however, for she had to be introduced to the crowd of onlookers, one or two of whom she had met at the races, but then came the judge's whistle.

"Miss Humphrey will serve first."

Becky faced the other girl with a fierce determination to win. She had given the pony race to Lucile; now there was no reason why she should not even up on Billy, and she plunged into the game with a fire that amazed the others, winning the first set with six straight games.

Billy rallied valiantly, however, taking six games in the next set to Becky's three. The last set was hard fought. Billy got five games to

Becky's three, then the Chicago girl put on a spurt and won the next two. The last game remained at forty-forty for nearly five minutes, until Becky made a final lucky stroke which Billy could not reach—and the cup was hers!

Van Blount awarded it with a languidly dignified speech which Schuyler spoiled by hearty outbursts, and the cup was first passed around through the group and then stored in the car to be taken home. Billy was the first to congratulate her rival and her whole-hearted manner of doing it was to Becky the pleasantest part of the entire day.

The girls took Becky into the clubhouse, where they cleaned up and made ready for lunch. Becky was through long before any of the others and she strolled out to the dock for a look at the lake. As she was standing near the boat landing, glancing at the gorgeously-fitted launches beneath, she heard a startled gasp from behind.

"By the jumpin' Jerusalem! If it ain't Cap'n Becky!"

Whirling about, she saw a trim, speedy launch fastened to the opposite side of the dock. With amazed, grease-smudged face peering up over the planking, clad in a mechanic's overalls, stood the boy whom she had last seen on the Indian River, months before.

"Lewis Ahlswede!" exclaimed Becky, incredulously. Then she sprang across the dock and held out her hand eagerly. "Why, where on earth did you spring from?"

CHAPTER VII

A NEAR-MAROONING

Lewis could only stare at her in dumb amazement for a moment, then he looked down at his hands and shook his head.

"I'd get you all greased up," he said. "Say, you could 'a' knocked me over with a feather! What you doin' here? Where you stayin'? I thought you were in Chicago."

"So I was until a few days ago," laughed Becky in delight. "I'm visiting the Hattons, over at their farm. But tell me about yourself, Lewis! I've been so busy the last day or two I haven't thought of a thing and didn't ask Mrs. Hatton."

"Me?" came his reply. "You got that postal I sent you?"

Becky nodded. "You didn't give any address to answer to."

"I know," responded Lewis, brightening up a trifle. "I wrote it on the way up. You see, Mrs. Hatton sent me a ticket an' said there was work waitin' for me. I got my outfit together an' lit out o' Melbourne like a streak.

"When I got up here I saw Mr. Hatton. Ain't he a peach?" Becky nodded. "He said he'd give me a good job on his place and then asked if I'd like to work over here to the lake. I says yes, o' course, an' he says that Mr. Dustin——"

"Billy Dustin?" cried Becky, in surprise.

"His ol' man. You know Billy?" grinned Lewis, and the girl nodded again, her eyes alight. "Well, Mr. Dustin wanted some one to 'tend to his boat durin' the summer. That struck me right, an' here I am. Say, ain't it great to see you, though!"

Becky was about to answer, when a peculiar look swept across the grimy face and Lewis suddenly leaped up to the dock.

"Say!" he cried, with sudden excitement, "if I thought that it was you——"

"Sure, it's me!" laughed Becky. "What are you talking about?"

"Young Dustin," scowled Lewis, with a glare toward the club. "Him an' his cousin come down 'bout twenty minutes ago an' looked over the boat. They didn't pay no 'tention to me, o' course. Dusty says, 'I'll have to win out just once, Hump. She's mighty fine, but she's licked me so bad I'll have to get even.'"

"I know what he meant," chuckled Becky, with eager interest. "Go on; what next?"

"So it was you, eh?" returned Lewis, frowning harder. "Well, they fixed up a scheme to take some girl out for a ride. Dusty says he'd land her up on Goose Island, 'bout three mile up the shore, then chase off with the *Loafer*—that's the boat, here. He fixed it with Jack for him to take out the rest o' the bunch a little later an' rescue you."

Becky listened open-eyed to this recital of Dusty's plotting. She never doubted for an instant that she was the intended victim. As Lewis spoke she felt a thrill of hopelessness. Why couldn't she be left to enjoy herself? Then she recalled Lewis' quotation of Dusty's speech to Jack, and her mouth set. Her enemies had been delivered into her hands! She glanced up at the club and saw Lucile come out and glance around. Becky waved her hand, then spoke rapidly to Lewis.

"Now listen! Don't let on you know me. Get down in the boat and show me how to start an' stop her."

Lewis obeyed quickly. There was little to learn and Becky's quick mind comprehended at once.

"All right—I guess I understand. Dusty's goin' to take me out an' lose me—see? Well, he'll take me out—but he won't lose me." Becky thought rapidly while she was speaking. "I don't

want him to think you told me about it, though. You mustn't lose your job."

"Huh! A lot I care for that!" returned the boy. "I'm only puttin' in time here an' makin' money. I've got an advertisin' scheme——"

"Hush!" cautioned Becky, as Lucile ran down the dock. The two girls stood looking over the boats, ignoring the busy young mechanic below them, until Dusty, Billy, Schuyler and Jack waved to them to come to lunch.

"We were inspecting the *Loafer,*" called out Becky, as they rejoined the party.

"Want to take a ride after lunch?" asked Dusty, carelessly.

"Oh, I'd love to!" replied Becky, with the innocent expression which no one but Schuyler had learned to distrust.

"All right. I'll take you out for a speed run and then come back for the rest of the bunch." A look of understanding passed between Jack and his cousin and Becky steeled her heart anew to the ingratiating grin of the latter.

It was a merry group about the big table in one corner of the dining room. Noiseless waiters served them and the dozen other tables filled by motoring parties, golfers and tennis "cranks." Becky still had a portion of her plan to develop.

She was sandwiched between Schuyler and Billy Humphrey, when suddenly the former leaned over.

"Say," he whispered, "what's wrong with you an' Dusty?"

Becky smiled and glanced around. The others were in high dispute over a questioned tennis ruling and paid no attention to her. In a few short sentences she told Schuyler of Dusty's plan.

"He's all right," she finished, "only he hates to be beaten by a girl. He thinks I'm green because I'm from Chicago, and this time I'm goin' to give him a jolt. After we've gone, help Jack to get the bunch out in his boat. Bring them right over to the island, because I may need help. Put Billy next, too. I want to be friends with Dusty, and perhaps this will show him I'm not as easy as I look."

"By golly!" Schuyler lost his angry look and began to laugh silently. "Good for you, Cap! I'll help, you bet!"

Becky was very sweet to Dusty as he helped her into the *Loafer,* inspected the gasoline tank, started the engine and cast loose the lines. As the boat puffed away Dusty reached into a locker and tossed over a rubber coat to Becky, putting on one himself.

"Better put that on. I'm goin' to let her out a bit."

No sooner was Becky safely wrapped up than Dusty advanced the lever and two great wings of water shot up from the bows. The boat slipped through the lake at marvelous speed and Becky exclaimed admiringly as the shores darted past. She kept a sharp lookout for the island and soon saw it dead ahead.

"Oh, there's an island! Couldn't we land there, Dusty? Let's explore it!"

"Sure!" Dusty grinned again as he slowed down. Presently he shut off the gasoline, and the *Loafer* poked her nose gently into the sandy shore. Dusty leaped out, pulled her up, and then helped Becky to alight.

"It isn't a very inviting place, is it?" Becky gazed over the bare, rocky little island, grasping the boy's arm as she climbed over the stones. "Oh, this rubber coat! Wait a minute, till I throw it back into the boat."

"No use——" began the boy, but Becky was already running back. As she paused beside the launch she saw Dusty look out over the lake. The next instant she pushed out the boat, clambered over the rounded bow, fell on a locker and was afloat.

"Hey! What are you doin' out there?"

Becky chuckled as Dusty ran down to the shore. She had no need to start the engine, however, for her one push had carried the boat out twenty feet from shore. Piling cushions into one of the four easy chairs that filled the boat, she settled herself comfortably before replying.

"Take it easy," she called at length. "You've got quite a while to wait. Shall I throw you a cushion?"

"What d'you mean?" responded Dusty with an expression of dismay. "You ain't goin' to leave me here?"

"I ought to," replied Becky, gravely, "by rights; but I won't. You must have an awfully poor opinion of me, Billy Dustin. But this time you tried just one trick too many."

"What!" stammered the amazed boy. "Do—do you mean—you——"

"I know all about it," stated Becky, calmly.

"Did Jack——" began the other, and Becky laughed.

"No, Jack didn't. Never mind about that. You're goin' to stay there till the rest come."

"Say, look here!" pleaded Dusty, in dismay. "Don't be so hard on a fellow——"

"I suppose you didn't think it'd be hard on me to leave me sitting out there?"

"Honest, I never thought about it. Come on in an' we'll go back a-flyin'," he coaxed.

"No, we won't," responded Becky. "Anyhow, I see a boat comin' up the lake now."

A speck appeared, and as he saw it Dusty relapsed into a sullen silence. He sat down on the shore, idly flipping stones into the water. Gradually the boat drew nearer until Becky thought she could make out the figures of the other members of the party.

Dusty, however, could not lose his good humor long and, at this instant, he grinned over the water at Becky.

"Guess it was a mean trick, Captain Becky," he called. "Take me in, won't you, an' call things square?"

"Honest, Dusty?" Becky hesitated.

"Cross my heart!"

The girl perceived that he was in earnest and without more ado she caught up the boat hook and poled the boat to shore. At the same moment a shout went up from the approaching boat and Dusty leaped in and started his engine.

"Need any help, Dusty?" came the voice of Billy Humphrey.

"Takin' a stroll on shore?" queried Schuyler, the other boat rounding up alongside the *Loafer*. Becky's relenting had come too late. Those in

the other boat, primed by Schuyler, shot a storm of chaffing at Dusty. The red-haired boy only responded with a grin as the boats proceeded.

Finally, however, he advanced his speed-lever. Jack's boat, a good deal slower, fell behind at once and the *Loafer* sped up to the dock a good half mile ahead.

"Guess I'll let you out here," announced Dusty, somewhat sheepishly. "I've got to try out this engine. She ain't workin' right an' the grease'll be flyin' pretty thick."

"All right," replied Becky as Lewis advanced to catch the bow of the launch. "Thank you ever so much for the ride!"

Motioning the young mechanic back, Dusty shot out in the lake again, leaving Becky on the wharf.

"Well, did it work?" asked Lewis, eagerly.

Much to the horror of one or two of her new acquaintances who were watching from the veranda of the club, Becky shamelessly sat on the dock and chatted with the grimy young man in overalls.

"It worked fine," she laughed, as she told what had happened. Then her mind went back to Lewis himself.

"Why, it's almost wonderful!" she went on. "I leave you in Florida and happen to run across you up in New Hampshire!"

"Yes," agreed Lewis, with something of his old-time shyness. "Never mind, Captain Becky, I'm goin' to make good yet. Just as soon's I get some coin saved up I'm goin' back to reportin'. It's mighty fine to be a resorter, but there's only one kind o' work for me."

"Where will you go?" asked Becky, interestedly. "New York?"

"No." Lewis shook his head sagely. "Not enough chance. I got a notion that a feller with any gumption can strike into a country newspaper job an' make a good thing. I know I got the stuff in me somewheres, an', by thunder, it's goin' to show up!"

Becky mentally approved the flashing eyes and determined chin of the boy, comparing him involuntarily with Schuyler Hatton, who had only to be agreeable and live up to his father's wealth.

"When are you goin' back home?" asked the boy, abruptly. The Humphrey boat was only a few hundred yards off now.

"The end of the month, I think."

"Whew!" whistled Lewis. "Makin' quite a stay, ain't you? I'm goin' to dig out before fall, I reckon. I got a newspaper list up in my room at Dustin's. I'm puttin' out an ad now in some York State papers—small ones in the middle of the state.

"I want to get a job where I can jump to Buffalo or New York when the chance comes. 'Sides, if I land with a good country paper I'll get more show to do somethin' worth while—beat it, Captain! They're comin' a-kitin'!"

Becky scrambled to her feet as Lewis dropped into the boat below. She awaited the landing of the hilarious party in the launch with her wide-eyed expression and Dusty dashed in from the opposite side of the slip at the same time.

"Oh, you Captain!" sang out Schuyler, eagerly. "What happened to Dusty?"

A chorus of yells came from the others as Jack leaped out with the rope.

"All right, I'm the goat," grinned Dusty when the laugh subsided. He held out his hand to Becky, who took it instantly. "I'll quit, Captain Becky—honest. I take off my hat to you."

"Rub it in, Becky!" advised Billy, heartlessly.

"Don't let up on him," added Lucile. "If he'd tried to play that trick on me, I'd have thrown him overboard!"

"Yes, you would!" interposed Jack, making believe to throw her off the dock. To his vast surprise, Lucile writhed out of his grasp, caught his wrist, and jerked him past her headfirst into the shallow water.

"Wow!" roared Dusty in delight. "That was a beaut! Look at him!"

As Jack's head appeared and he floundered to his feet the others went into another spasm of mirth, and Becky caught sight of Lewis doubled up in the boat beneath. While Jack was helped aboard she turned to Dusty, wiping her eyes.

"For a fact now, Dusty, are we friends?"

"On the square, Cap! I've had enough. And say—I—I'm sorry!"

Becky met his eyes and her face softened. The glance was enough for Dusty and with a whoop he seized Jack and rushed him toward the clubhouse to change his clothes. The others followed more slowly, gleefully discussing the events of the afternoon, and Becky could only exchange a mute farewell with Lewis.

"You ought to have run off with the boat," commented Schuyler to Becky in a low voice.

"It's all right now," laughed Becky, happily. "We've sworn to be friends from now on and I guess he means it. Go easy with him, Sky."

"Well," assented the other, half-heartedly, "a little joshin' won't hurt him, Cap. Shall we stay over for the dance to-night?"

"Please don't," replied Becky, quickly. "I'm really *awfully* tired, Sky. Then we were dancing last night, too. I'd much rather go home and

spend a quiet evening with your mother and father. They've been very kind to me."

"Right you are," assented Schuyler. "I hadn't thought o' that. I'll get after Jack, then. It's 'most four."

It was nearly five before they left the club. Jack was clad in a spare suit of flannels from Dusty's locker, and had fully regained his equanimity. He took his "joshing" with so good a grace and joined so heartily in the merriment that Becky involuntarily moved him up a few notches in her esteem.

"I believe this is the very happiest day I've ever spent!" she declared as they gave a last wave to Dusty, and only Schuyler fully comprehended her words.

CHAPTER VIII

BECKY'S DUKERIN

"Now, don't go so fast, Hump!" pleaded Lucile, as the clubhouse and the lake dropped out of sight behind. "It won't be dark for an hour. Take the hill road and show Becky some of the scenery."

"Right-o!" sang back Jack. "This car isn't any mountain-climber, though, and that hill road is some bumpy. Here we go, anyhow."

He swung the big car away from the main road into a less traveled one that led up into the hills to the right. Soon they were surrounded by scenery even wilder and more picturesque than that which they had passed through that morning. All around them rose the hills, with blue peaks towering high to the north, and rugged old Croyden piled up above them in the west.

Once they shot down through a valley and as a little town sprang into view ahead of them Becky gave a cry of delight.

"Oh, do stop, Hump! I want to see those dear little houses!"

"More like cottages," rejoined Billy, when her brother had halted the car on the slope of the hill. "See that little old one up above the others? That's more than a hundred years old, a good deal——"

"Built before the Revolution," chipped in Schuyler, "by one of the real original guaranteed genuine Green Mountain Boys. He's buried in the cemetery over the hill and there's a tablet up on the house."

"But they're all so pretty!" exclaimed Becky, admiringly. The little red and green houses, with their old wooden shutters and diminutive porches, delighted her. The very atmosphere of the village seemed to belong to centuries past, and she half expected to see men appear wearing knee-breeches and cocked hats. A moment later, however, the illusion was spoiled by the sight of a very gaunt woman who began to take in washing from a line, and Jack started the engine with a laugh.

"Lots of little places like that scattered around here," explained Billy. "Dad took a trip one summer and collected a wagonload of old four-poster beds an' things. We got 'em over at the farm now."

"I was out riding with Sky one day," went on Lucile, "and we struck an old stone farmhouse

that was all falling to ruins. It was in a little valley right close to the farm, too, and no one had ever heard anything about it."

"Let's get Dusty over some day an' take an explorin' trip," suggested Schuyler. Jack was having his hands full keeping the car in the narrow road, but he gave a grunt of assent.

"We'll take it on horseback, too," asserted Billy with decision. Schuyler and his sister cast hesitating glances at Becky.

"Oh, don't mind me," she laughed. "I might as well learn to ride now as any time. I think it'd be great."

Suddenly they plunged down out of the fading sunlight into a little wooded valley, full of odd twists and turns. It was fortunate that Jack had slowed down, for as they turned a bend Schuyler gave a yell. Just before them was a wagon.

Jack slued the car into the roadside. There was a lurch, a scream from Lucile and the car stopped with such suddenness that the three girls found themselves in a heap on the floor of the tonneau.

"All right," laughed Billy, pulling Lucile up as Becky scrambled back to the seat. "What's the trouble, Jack?"

"Search me," responded Hump, shutting off the whirring engine and leaping out. The wagon was standing quietly beside them and the driver was

grinning unsympathetically. He was a dark, swarthy fellow, and the wagon was covered with canvas. Beneath it were slung a number of wicker baskets and split cane fabrications.

"What'd you yell for?" asked Schuyler, turning to Lucile, a trifle angrily.

"We all yelled," laughed Becky, promptly, "and you yelled first."

"Sky!" came the voice of Hump from beneath the car. "Climb down here and lend a hand. Something's all smashed."

As the boy leaped out, Becky turned to the odd-looking wagon with interest that quickened as she saw a second face peering out from behind the form of the watching driver. The latter said something in a strange tongue and Lucile clutched Becky's arm.

"I believe they're gipsies!" she whispered. "I never saw any before, but they look like it."

The man grinned again as if he had caught the low words.

"Do ye want any help?" he asked, as the two boys crawled out from under the machine. There was a look of despair on Jack's face.

"I guess not, thanks," he replied. "We'll have to walk till we find a blacksmith."

"What!" exclaimed Billy. "Did that little bump smash things?"

"Do we have to walk home?" cried Lucile, in dismay.

"I guess so," grinned Jack, feebly. "Busted the transmission, I think. I don't know where we can get any one who can patch her up——"

"That's where I come in," interrupted the man on the wagon, and he slowly began to descend. "Ain't no garage in five mile o' here that I knows on, but I reckon I can fix ye up."

"How?" asked Schuyler, in surprise. "Where's your forge and stuff?"

The man dropped under the car and chuckled as he inspected it. Then he turned to the wagon.

"Esther! Pen the young ladies' dukerin while I set up the forge."

A rather nice looking but not exactly tidy woman appeared and climbed down while the man went to the back of the wagon. The woman approached the car and smiled up at Becky, who was nearest her.

"What did he mean?" asked Billy, with a puzzled frown.

"To tell your fortunes, dearies!" laughed the woman. "We be Romanies, or gipsies, as you'm would say."

"Fortunes!" cried Lucile in delight, leaning over and opening the tonneau door. "Come on,

girls! Let's all sit around in the grass and get our fortunes told. Jack! Sky!"

"Does 'dukerin' mean fortune?" laughed Becky. The woman nodded and smiled again. "And we have to cross your hand with silver, of course?"

Another smiling nod. The girls seated themselves in the grass at the roadside. Dusk was just creeping over the valley and the two boys were helping the man lift something out of the wagon. A moment later they rejoined the girls and sat down.

"Is he going to fix it?" asked Billy.

"Sure!" chuckled Schuyler. "He's got a peach of a portable forge there with charcoal an' everything. He's all right."

"Give us some money, boys!" cried Lucile, excitedly. "Who'll be first?"

"I will," declared Billy, with her usual promptness. She held out her hand, the woman pocketed the coin that lay in the palm, and all leaned forward in eager interest when the woman began to speak.

"Oh, dearie, dearie! What a strange girl you'm be, to be sure! My dook tells me you likes to play with the young gentlemen and order them about. Don't laugh at the dukerin, dearie!"

"I can't help it," smiled Billy. "Go ahead."

"You'm be going to take a long journey over-

seas, too, on a big ship. My, my! My dook tells me about a lot of money to spend free and easy, fine Paris gowns and hats, swell young gentlemen to wait on you——"

"Tell me something new," laughed Billy. "I know I'm going to Europe next year, already."

"You've got a strange hand, dearie! You'm be going to have a bad illness with the throat, most likely, but no harm done. I sees a big surprise coming before long, a happy surprise. You'm be going to have a happy time, dearie, and that's all my dook tells me now."

Billy gave up her place to Lucile, disappointed that the woman had given her no more details, and rather disposed to laugh at her. By this time it was nearly dark. The gipsy, or Romany, as he called himself, had his forge fire going well, and it cast a weird light over the group in the grass by the road. Jack suggested lighting the lamps, but the others enjoyed the ruddy forge-light too well to allow this.

Lucile's fortune proved no more entertaining than had that of Billy. She was promised the usual good luck, her character was very well sketched, and two or three minor incidents were hit on by the woman. Becky's turn came last, and as she held up her palm into the light of the forge the woman seized it with more interest.

"What a hand this is, to be sure! Not so much money, to be sure, but what 'mazing adventures, dearie! Let's see. Firstly, you've 'most died, but got well again—not so long since, neither! You'm be far from home and may be farther before long, dearie. But always with friends, always with friends."

"Why, Becky!" gasped Lucile, but Schuyler motioned her to be quiet. Becky only smiled.

"You've had most 'mazing times and my dook tells me they took place on the seas, far from here. My, what a fate line this is, to be sure! You'm been having hard fights, dearie, and winning them, more by token. I sees more fights a-coming, too."

The woman closed her eyes and rocked back and forth for a moment. Becky, a little frightened, tried to withdraw her hand, but the other clung to it and she desisted. Finally the woman continued:

"My dook shows me big trees, dearie, with mossy streamers-like hanging down. There's water all around and a little boat with you on the deck and smoke a-coming from her iron pipe. Now it's gone, dearie, and my dook shows me a big house with pillars in front. All the shutters are tight, 'cause it's raining. There you comes on a big horse—Lor', what a horse!" She

opened her eyes and broke off abruptly. "That's all, dearie."

"I wonder what it means!" exclaimed Billy, half believing the woman's words. "Hanging moss would be down south, wouldn't it?"

"But the big house might be anywheres!" cried Schuyler, excitedly. "Are you goin' to tell my fortune now?"

"No more, young gentlemen," smiled the woman. "I likes to tell 'em, but it tires a body out to see things far away."

"I wonder what my surprise is to be?" said Billy. "I think you might have told us some more. You told Becky a whole lot of things."

"Billy's mad because Becky got all the fighting in hers," chuckled Hump. "Likes to play with the young gentlemen all right, don't you, Billy?"

"Would you like to see the wagon, young lady?" asked the woman, addressing herself to Becky.

"Of course I would!" Becky sprang to her feet, as did the rest. "Do you live in there all the time?"

"Mostly. We travels around selling baskets and tinkering, but it's a poor country hereabouts for Romanies. We be going away right soon."

"Oh, what a darling!" cried Becky, delightedly. She was standing beside the wagon, the cover of which the woman had lifted, and was holding up

a little girl of two or three years. Black of hair and eyes, the baby stared gravely and soberly at Becky, amid the admiring comments of the other girls, while the man paused to watch with a grin.

While the three girls admired the decidedly handsome baby, the boys returned to the car with a sniff of disgust and lit the lamps. A moment later the man threw down his tools and brought them a newly welded rod. Jack held it up in the light of the lamps.

"By golly, that's fine work! I b'lieve she'll hold all summer."

"Ought to," retorted the gipsy. "I does my work well, young gentleman. Will ye give me a lift with the forge?"

The three of them replaced the still smoking forge in the wagon. Then Schuyler removed one of the lamps and held it while Jack replaced the broken rod and pronounced all shipshape once more.

"Climb in, girls!" cried Schuyler, while Jack paid the man for his timely assistance. The girls replaced the baby safely in the arms of the smiling woman and climbed into the tonneau.

"All ready?" inquired Jack. With a shouted farewell to the Romany family, the party moved on once more. The brilliant lamps cut a swath of light through the trees of the valley and as there

was little danger of meeting anyone at this hour Jack threw on the power.

"Keep quiet back there," he yelled as Billy protested. "I want to get some supper before breakfast time! Bumpin' you, Becky?"

"Not a bit—I like it!" shouted back the Chicago girl, and on they went through the hills. In half an hour they struck the main road not far from Resteasy Farm and a few moments later Becky, Schuyler and Lucile were safe at home with the tennis trophy. Billy and Jack refused to stop for something to eat, as their parents would be expecting them and they were too tired to spend the evening.

"So you won the cup, eh?" laughed Mr. Hatton, as they sat around the table and told the story of the day's adventures. "Good for you, Captain Becky! And all's square now with young Dustin?"

"We'll be good friends from now on," returned Becky, happily.

"Even if the gipsy woman did say you would have lots of fighting to do!" laughed Lucile.

"Did you see young Ahlswede over at the lake?" asked Mrs. Hatton.

"Oh, yes!" cried Becky. "And he told me how good you had been to him and——"

"I got you!" shouted Schuyler. "It was him put you next!"

"Schuyler!" reproved his mother. "Be more careful of your English!"

But Schuyler was too excited to care for such little things, and in the end Becky had to confess that Lewis had assisted her in her plotting. The others promised not to tell Dusty, however, and Becky went to bed without a flaw in her memories of the eventful day.

CHAPTER IX

BECKY SECURES AN INTERVIEW

For several days after the eventful visit to the Sunapee Club Becky remained quietly at the Farm. The first whirl of her vacation over, she decided to take things easy for a time. There was an excellent tennis court behind the house where she had many a game with Schuyler Hatton or the other young people who lived near by.

But the happiest time of all was that spent in the little runabout with Mr. Hatton and Ruth. Becky was never tired of going over the immense farm, and her undisguised interest in everything was a source of constant delight to Mr. Hatton. He had good reason to be proud of his estate. Money had been spent lavishly upon it. Every one of the wide barns and stables was electrically lighted, tile-paved, and equipped with the very latest in machinery.

Becky cared little for most of the live stock, but went into raptures over the ponies and horses. Mr. Hatton had a number of the finest saddle horses and Becky was not long in learning to ride

after one of the grooms had given her a few lessons, Schuyler assisting.

Mrs. Hatton, too, had her claims on Becky's time. Formal social relations were maintained with three or four families in the vicinity, who, like the Hattons, were spending the summer among the hills. On these Mrs. Hatton and Becky, with Lucile, made calls in the big limousine and received calls in return. It was a new life to Becky, but she threw herself into it with her usual vigor and enjoyed herself immensely.

The next racing event on the pony track had to be postponed, much to the disappointment of all. There had been heavy rains for two days preceding and the track was in no condition to be used. Becky's disappointment was greatly alleviated, however, by the arrival of Lewis Ahlswede at Resteasy Farm that evening. Her first intimation of this was when the solemn-faced butler gravely ushered in the boy, much to the surprise of all the Hatton family.

"Well, where on earth did you come from?" cried Lucile, cordially.

"It was pretty bad riding, for a fact," grinned Lewis, sheepishly, as he shook hands with everyone. "I rode over from Dustin's."

"We're glad to see you——"

"Anything the matter?" Schuyler interrupted his mother's rather formal greeting anxiously.

"Nothin' much," returned Lewis, uneasily. "I quit my job."

There was a chorus of exclamations at this statement.

"Well, sit down!" exclaimed Mr. Hatton, jovially. "Tell us what's wrong, and maybe we can fix things up."

"It—it ain't that," stammered Lewis, as he sank into the depths of a big leather-cushioned chair. "I didn't get fired—I quit."

"Oh, I see!" smiled Mr. Hatton. "Work too hard for you?"

Lewis was getting more uncomfortable every minute, and Becky promptly came to his relief.

"I'd like to see any work that's too hard for him," she laughed. "You should have seen him hauling the jib and centerboard on the *Olivette*."

"No, it wasn't that, either," responded Lewis, throwing the girl a grateful glance. "I—I just kind o' got restless."

Finding that he was not meeting with the criticism which he had evidently expected, the boy gradually regained his composure and related his story.

"You see, I guess I ain't made to do reg'lar work," he confessed at length. "They treated me

fine an' I ain't got no kick comin', but—well, it ain't like reportin'. That's what I wanted to see you folks about. You've been awful good to me an' I hope you won't get sore——"

"Nonsense!" laughed Mr. Hatton. "I'm glad to see that you have the ambition to want something better, my boy."

Becky nodded eagerly and Lewis flushed a little.

"I don't know's reportin' is *better,*" he said, "but it's more my kind o' work, somehow. I been at Dustin's all summer an' now I've got some money saved up. I borrowed one o' their horses an' rode over——"

"Look here," broke in Schuyler, eagerly, "you stay right here for a few days, will you?"

"Here?" repeated Lewis, in amazement. "Why —why——"

To Becky's unbounded surprise, Mrs. Hatton smiled and nodded.

"Yes, Lewis, we would be very glad to have you."

"But I ain't got my things," said the boy, in dismay. "An' the horse——"

"Never mind that," declared Schuyler. "We'll send over for them. The horse can wait. Captain Becky an' I'll take your case in hand an' get you settled for keeps."

The boy, flushed and embarrassed, could only nod.

"Good!" cried Becky, in delight. "Now, what about that advertisement scheme of yours?"

"I gave it up," said Lewis, after explaining his plan to the others. "I thought mebbe I'd see you folks first about it."

"Hm!" reflected Mr. Hatton, thoughtfully. "Are you set on going to New York, Lewis?"

"Why, no, I ain't exactly set on it," returned the boy, doubtfully. "Only I thought there might be a better show over there."

"I suppose you wouldn't consider staying around here?"

"Sure, I would," returned Lewis, promptly, "if I could get a job that looked like it had any chance to work up."

Becky gazed at Mr. Hatton in breathless suspense. He seemed to be pleased by the ready answer of the boy.

"Well," he replied, slowly, "I think there is a very good chance, indeed, Lewis. At Cornish Flats there is a paper called the *Record,* owned by a Mr. Downs. It is a daily and weekly, and makes a specialty of the news of the farms all around here, such as mine, Mr. Humphrey's, Von Platen's, and the rest. It also 'covers' what goes on at the

Sunapee Club. It has a pretty big circulation all through the country.

"Now, you might get a job there. I don't know Mr. Downs personally and I can't help you with him, but his paper is a good one and I really don't think you could do better."

"Thank you, sir," replied the boy, his eyes flashing. "I'll go over there in the morning and see him about it."

Becky smiled as she watched the animated boy. She well knew that he was in a full-fledged dream of greatness and her thoughts were still busy with him an hour later, when she had gone up to her room.

"I don't know," she murmured, as she prepared for bed. "Lewis is just a little too sure about things. I'm afraid he'll run up against a wall some day. But the shock will do him good, maybe."

How close Lewis was to his "blank wall" she did not find out until the next morning. After breakfast Lewis and Schuyler went together to inspect some fishing supplies, while Becky and Lucile struck out to the tennis courts, the day being a fine one.

Becky was so absorbed in tennis, then in changing her dress and looking over a new one which arrived from New York for Lucile, that she gave

no thought to Lewis. Her first thought of him was when she emerged on the wide veranda, shortly before lunch, and found Lewis there, plunged in profound dejection.

"Why, what's the matter?" she exclaimed, sympathetically.

The boy did not answer at once. When he looked up there was a droop to his mouth that Becky had never seen there before.

"I rode over to the Flats a while ago," he responded at last.

"To see the paper man?" suggested the girl, eagerly.

"Yes," Lewis nodded. "I seen him, all right."

"Well, what'd he say?" urged the girl. "What's the matter, anyhow?"

"I guess I got scared too quick," confessed Lewis. "Mr. Downs was a great big man, lookin' like he wanted to eat you. O' course, I struck him for a job first crack. He says, 'Where are your references? Had any experience?'

"I says I'd had experience on the Melbourne *Times*. 'Fore I could say any more, he asked me what I quit for. I says I got fired, an' he chased me out so quick——"

"Didn't you tell him *why* you got fired?" cried Becky. "Didn't you tell him you were stayin' here, and refer him to Mr. Hatton?"

"I didn't get time to do nothin'," returned the boy. "He snapped me up so short it took my breath away."

"You're a great newspaper man!" declared Becky, scornfully. "Why didn't you *make* him listen?"

"He was awful busy," defended Lewis, weakly.

"Well, isn't your time worth as much to you as his is to him?"

"I reckon, mebbe," admitted the boy. "It was a dandy place, though," he added regretfully. "Heaps bigger'n the *Times* office, with a real linotype machine, too."

But Becky was no longer listening. An idea had sprung into her active brain and she was grappling with the problem it presented. Finally she turned on the boy with a suddenness that made him jump.

"Lewis! You ride over there again late this afternoon—not before three o'clock, though—and go right after him. You mustn't let him think you're such a flat failure as all that. Stick to him just like you would if you were interviewin' him. I'll fix it up."

"*You* will!" exclaimed Lewis, in astonishment. "Why, what——"

"I'm goin' to see him right after lunch,"

announced the girl, with determination. "I'm not afraid of him. Hush! here's Lucile."

While at lunch Becky arranged with Lucile for a household shopping trip to the Flats that afternoon. An hour later the two girls took the runabout, which Becky was quite able to manage by this time, and left Schuyler and Lewis looking after them, rather disconsolately.

"You'd think they had lost their last friend," laughed Lucile, waving gayly back at the porch. "Sky thinks a girl always needs some one to protect her. Where are you going in town?"

"Your mother wants me to buy some stuff for the upstairs curtains," responded Becky. "That's all I have to do, so you can drop me——"

"Nonsense!" said Lucile. "I'll go with you. Then we'll get the rest of the stuff together and send father's telegrams, have a soda and come home."

"Oh, yes," cried Becky, as if in remembrance, "while you're buyin' what you have to get, I'll run over to the *Record* office and see Mr. Downs a minute."

"Going to get Lewis a job?" asked Lucile, guessing correctly enough. Becky's temples flushed, but she managed to turn the subject without revealing her reason for visiting the *Record*.

When Lucile entered the one general store to purchase the list of small things needed at the Farm, Becky turned the runabout toward a small, neat brick building which she had already noted as the *Record* office.

Running up the steps, the girl found herself before a long counter, at one end of which ran a passageway. Behind the counter sat an angular man with only one eye; behind him was a partition which cut from view the remainder of the office.

"Is this Mr. Downs?" asked Becky, as the man looked up.

"Not yet it ain't," he responded, and the girl shivered a little at sight of his hollow eye. "You'll find the boss in his office. First door." He pointed to the passageway.

"Thank you," said Becky, as she advanced and entered the dark passage. The first door was marked "Private," and below this was a card printed in big, heavy type. Becky paused to read it.

"Collectors, actors, and subscriptions received in front. All real money received here. If you've got it, come in."

"Well," thought the girl, looking at the notice a little doubtfully, "I'm not a collector, actor, or subscriber, so I'll go right in. Maybe it's only

a joke." With which consoling reflection she pushed open the door.

She stood in a bright, pleasant office, filled with two desks, a typewriter, letter files, and—a man. Mr. Downs quite justified Lewis' description of him. He was not so fat as he was big. His face was irregular, bristling hair rose above his brow, a ragged black mustache graced his upper lip, and he glared at Becky through thick spectacles that made his eyes look enormous.

"Good morning," began the girl, timidly, her temples red. "I came to see you about getting a job——"

"Sit down," interrupted Mr. Downs, pulling forward a desk chair and rolling it over the floor at her. His voice was gruff, but not unkind, and Becky took heart. "My dear young lady," he continued, removing his spectacles and looking at her, "are you a stenographer?"

The girl stared at him for a moment before she comprehended his meaning. Then her temples grew redder, but she only smiled as she replied:

"Oh, I didn't want a job myself. You see, I'm visiting over at Mr. Hatton's farm, and it's about a friend I've called."

"Wanted to see about a friend, eh?" smiled the editor. "Well, fire away."

"He came over to see you this morning," said

Becky, with some hesitation as to how to proceed. "I guess he'll be back again, but I——"

"Hold on just a moment," protested Mr. Downs, stopping her abruptly. "Let me get this straightened out, young lady. You aren't talking about a young fellow named Swede, are you?"

"Lewis Ahlswede," nodded Becky, smiling.

"Do you mean to say that that kid is staying over at Hatton's and wants to get a job *here?*" His gesture was an expressive one and his face showed his amazement.

"That's it," responded Becky. "You can ask Mr. Hatton about him if you like. You see, when we were in Florida last spring the man he was working for cheated me. When Lewis told him so, the man fired him. He didn't get a chance——"

"That's all right," broke in Mr. Downs. "I thought he was some tramp printer wantin' a job this morning, so I cut him pretty short. That's how he got fired, eh? I might be able to use that kind of a kid."

"Well, I just wanted to put in a good word for him," announced Becky, rising. "He said he was goin' to keep after you."

"Good for him," laughed Mr. Downs. "I'll not scare him off this time. But stop a minute. I want to speak to you."

CHAPTER X

BECKY BECOMES A REPORTER

Becky reseated herself, in some little surprise. Of course it was about Lewis that he wanted to speak, she thought. Mr. Downs rubbed his eyes, wheeled his chair around and looked out of the window for a moment before continuing.

"Your name is what?" he asked, without glancing at Becky.

"Beckwith—Marjorie Beckwith," replied the girl, wondering.

"Miss Beckwith," went on the editor, slowly, "I've been handicapped here for some time. You see, the *Record* circulates all through this piece of country and the weekly paper has, or ought to have, big write-ups of everything from Sunapee Lake to East Cornish. The trouble is that it hasn't been having the right kind of stuff. My local reporter quit two weeks ago and I haven't filled his place yet. But I need more than that. I've got to have some one who knows the 'resorters' well enough to write interestingly about them. You see, Miss Beckwith——"

He was interrupted suddenly by the girl, who leaped to her feet and sprang toward the window which opened on the side street.

"There he is now!" she exclaimed, turning and running to the door. "I'll be back in a moment."

Becky had caught a glimpse of the familiar figure of Lewis astride a horse. As she ran out to the street, the one-eyed man staring after her in amazement, she completely forgot that Mr. Downs had switched off the subject of Lewis. Of course his last speech had concerned the boy, she thought, and it was lucky that Lewis had not waited until three o'clock before coming to town.

Upon reaching the street Becky saw Lewis at the corner, hesitating at sight of the familiar runabout. Heedless of the curious village loafers, Becky waved her handkerchief and shouted aloud:

"Lewis! Hurry!"

The boy urged his horse toward her, pulled up at the curb and slipped from the saddle.

"Have you seen him?" he asked, eagerly.

"Sure," replied Becky, breathlessly. "Hitch the horse and come in. You're just in time."

Without waiting, she turned back to the *Record* office. Lewis hastily tied the horse and sprang up the steps, joining her as she again reached the door of the editor's office. They entered together.

"I saw him going by," Becky laughed in explanation. Mr. Downs nodded and turned to Lewis.

"We were just discussing you, Ahlswede. Do you think you can cover locals here in town, do write-ups, and set type on the side?"

"Sure I can," answered the boy, readily. Becky caught a twinkle in Mr. Downs' eye. "But what do you want a compositor for?" went on the boy. "Ain't that a machine I hear goin'?"

Becky, turning her head, caught a metallic "whir" from the inner offices, while Mr. Downs broke into a laugh.

"You'll do," he said. "We have to have bills and some job work set by hand, though. How much do you want?"

Becky watched the boy breathlessly. Lewis hesitated an instant, then his eyes met those of the editor.

"As much as I'm worth to you," he responded, frankly. "I don't know what you've been payin' an' it wouldn't matter if I did. If you want some one to make good I reckon you'll be willin' to pay for it."

"And I am," chuckled the big man, "if you *make* good. Anyway, I won't starve you while you're taking a chance. That settles you, Ahlswede. Now for *you,* Miss Beckwith."

"Me?" repeated Becky, rising. "Why, what do you mean? Where do I come in?"

"To tell the truth," responded Mr. Downs, glancing keenly at her, "I'm hesitating a little about proposing it to a guest of the Hattons. But when another of their guests takes a job with me, I'm ready for anything. It's like this:

"As I started to tell you, I want to build up the weekly *Record* through the surrounding country by intimate stories of the big estates and their owners. The employees on these farms alone would make a good-sized subscription list. This season is about over, but I'd like to end it well. I can't spare a man, or get one, for that matter, to do what I want. But you could do the work."

"I?" cried Becky, in surprise, her temples flushing as she stared at the editor.

"You bet she could," broke in Lewis, hastily. Then he stopped, with abrupt self-consciousness.

"If you would," went on Mr. Downs, "I'd pay you city rates—five dollars a column. You could fill a couple of columns every week in your spare time, send the stuff to Ahlswede here, and he could go over it and put it into shape. Would you like to try it?"

"But I can't write!" stammered Becky, in confusion. "I've never even tried."

"All I want is the facts," replied Mr. Downs. "Ahlswede'll do the rest."

"Then you ought to pay him for it," exclaimed Becky.

"That's exactly what I'm hiring him for," laughed the editor.

It was now the turn of Lewis to watch in anxious interest. Becky thought swiftly of all that the proposition meant. She saw at once that she was in a position to take it up, and was almost nodding her head decisively, when a sudden thought occurred to her.

"Oh," she cried, "perhaps the Hattons wouldn't like it, Mr. Downs. I'd just love to do it if you think I could, but I won't offend them, you see."

"Well, talk it over with them to-night," suggested the editor. "I have no doubt that they will advise you to do it. If it's all right, suppose you bring in some stuff to-morrow."

"Stuff? What kind of stuff do you mean?" asked the puzzled girl.

"Why, copy—writing," laughed Mr. Downs, while Lewis grinned at the girl. "Manuscript is always known as 'stuff' in the newspaper office, you know."

"But — mercy!" exclaimed Becky, flushing again. "Why, I couldn't think of a thing by to-morrow, Mr. Downs!"

"Oh, just write up the Hatton farm in general. To-morrow is Tuesday and we run out the weekly on Thursday. Give the size of the place, the names of the managers of the departments, what kind of stock they are raising and how much, and a general description of what goes on there."

"Well, I guess I could do that," returned Becky, doubtfully; "but not about all the other places. I don't know them well enough."

"Any of the men on Mr. Hatton's farm can tell you all about the others," suggested Lewis.

"Yes," added the editor, with a nod. "Besides, I want what goes on socially, too, like parties, dances and all that. I have a correspondent at the lake who sends me the Sunapee news. That'll give you an idea. Here, take this copy of the paper with you."

Mr. Downs folded a paper and handed it to Becky. The girl rose in confusion, Lewis following.

"Then I'll come in to-morrow," she said, smiling. "I'll do the best I can, and—thank you very much, Mr. Downs!" she added.

"That's all right. I think you'll do," responded the editor, genially.

Lewis remained for a further talk with his new employer, while Becky, her head awhirl, fled to the runabout. She had been gone much longer

than she intended and she found Lucile awaiting her impatiently.

"Where on earth have you been?" asked the latter.

"I don't believe I've been on earth at all," laughed Becky. She began to tell Lucile of the amazing proposition made her, and then stopped. "Wait till to-night," she explained; "then I'll tell you everything." And, in spite of all her coaxing and urging, Lucile could not extract another word on the subject from Becky. Not, indeed, until they were seated at the dinner table that night did Becky make her revelation. She had already warned Lewis not to say anything about it.

"I'm glad you have a position you like," said Mrs. Hatton, after the boy had told them of his second interview with Mr. Downs. "How about your living arrangements?"

"I'll have a little room upstairs over the office," and Lewis' face was gleaming with interest. "It won't cost nothin', either. I'm goin' to move in to-morrow an' start right to work."

"Good for you," declared Mr. Hatton. "I'm sorry to lose you so quickly, but it's the best thing for you, I suppose. Remember that we'll always be glad to help you in any way we can."

"I wish you'd all give *me* a little help *right now,*" put in Becky, with a glance at Lucile.

"Oh, is that it?" cried the latter, eagerly. "Are you going to tell the secret now?" Becky smiled.

"I hope you'll never fail to ask us whenever you do want help," said Mrs. Hatton, kindly. "What is it, dear?"

"Well, I'm goin' to be a reporter—that is, if you think I ought to," Becky blurted out.

"A reporter!" exclaimed Schuyler. All gave the girl a quick look.

"What do you mean by the last words?" Mr. Hatton said, quietly.

Becky flushed and dropped her eyes.

"Well," she replied, slowly, "it seems almost like being a spy, but I guess it isn't. Mr. Downs wants me to write about Resteasy and all the other farms for his weekly paper. I told him I'd have to ask you about it first——"

"Hurray!" shouted the excited Schuyler, almost startling the impassive butler into dropping a plate. Mr. Hatton silenced him sharply.

"Is Downs going to pay you?" he asked. "It's not a steady job?"

"Oh, no," replied Becky, at once. "Just for the next two or three weeks, while I'm around here. The season is nearly over, but he wants to get everybody to subscribe for next year. He'll

pay me five dollars a column. He said I ought to have a couple of columns in each week."

"Still I don't see where we come in," smiled Mrs. Hatton.

"Why, he wants me to write about Resteasy and give it to him in the morning," responded the embarrassed girl; "and about society and dances and all that. I thought maybe you wouldn't like to have me do it."

"Nonsense!" laughed Mr. Hatton. "I'm glad to see you have the chance, Captain Becky. Nothing like picking up a little money when you can find it lying around. Not only that, but I guess we can help you. What does he want to know about the farm?"

Becky related what the editor had told her.

"Well," continued Mr. Hatton, thoughtfully, "my secretary spends two days a week up here. Last month he worked out a pamphlet that I had intended to publish, but have abandoned. It gave every detail about the farm that you could possibly use. I'll get it for you after dinner."

"But," objected Becky, wonderingly, "would it be right for me to use that and then get paid for it?"

"Right?" broke in Lewis, scornfully. "Sure it would! Why, lots o' folks run a newspaper by

writing it with the scissors! Swipin' is all right enough if you do it right."

"True enough," laughed Mr. Hatton. "No, you needn't worry about that, Becky."

"Let's send in a whoppin' big lot this time," suggested Schuyler, in his excitement. "We can all help. Lucile, you tell about the dance over at Ardens' night before last. I'll write up our race meetings. Then there's Helen Hunt's birthday party that Ruth went to to-night."

"I can get that over the 'phone," volunteered Lewis, eagerly.

"Gracious!" laughed Mrs. Hatton, "you'll have us all famous, Captain Becky."

Becky had listened to the list of suggestions with heightened color and growing dismay.

"But Mr. Downs can never use all that!" she broke out at last, in confused protest. "Why, he'll think I'm trying to cram in everything I can, so as to make more money!"

"So you are," chuckled Mr. Hatton. "That's just what he wants, Becky. You wait and see."

So Becky resigned herself to wait until the dinner was over, but not without further misgivings. Then a new idea occurred to her and after a moment of dismayed reflection she voiced her thought.

"You folks can't write that out," she said to Schuyler and Lucile.

"Why not?" demanded the boy. "S'pose we don't know enough?"

"Don't be silly!" retorted Becky, indignantly. "You know I didn't mean that. But if Mr. Downs pays me for doing work, then *I'm* the one to do it—not you."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Lewis, hotly. "You ain't got no kick comin'. He don't care who does the work so long as he gets it in time for the weekly paper."

"But I do," insisted Becky, the color flaming in her temples once more. "You can tell me what an' how to write, of course, but I've got to do the writing myself."

"Why, we're only trying to help out," said Lucile, protestingly.

"All right, Captain Becky," exclaimed Mr. Hatton, with a nod of approval. "Your idea is the right one. If Schuyler and Lucile want to write part of your account, then you must pay them for what they write."

"We don't want any pay——" began Schuyler, excitedly. His father cut him short.

"What you can do, Becky, is this: That pamphlet is all typewritten, of course. You can give that to Lewis to go over and select what he wants.

It need not be copied, as I have no use for the matter now. While he's doing this you can write the other things."

"Oh, that's fine!" cried Becky, clapping her hands in delight. "But I don't want to spoil your pamphlet!"

"You won't," smiled the latter. "I've completely given up all thought of using it in its present form. Besides, I'd be glad to see part of it in print. When it comes out, Lewis, you tell Mr. Downs to send over a hundred copies and charge them to me. A good many of the men would like to have them, I think."

Becky could hardly repress her eagerness to get to work, and right after dinner the party scattered, Mr. Hatton and Becky going in search of the pamphlet, Schuyler running to the telephone and Lewis and Lucile clearing off the library table. Becky had started on her first "assignment."

CHAPTER XI

DISASTER

"There, how'll this do?"

Becky finished her copying with a sigh and handed over the pages to Mr. Hatton for inspection. The pamphlet-to-be lay before her, but, as it was altogether too long for the girl's purposes, she had been forced to copy out the parts selected by Lewis and Mr. Hatton.

The latter adjusted his glasses and began to read. Becky watched him with anxious eyes while Lucile was going over her account of the Ardens' dance and Lewis and Schuyler were busy across the table.

Suddenly Mr. Hatton frowned in his reading and looked up at Becky. The girl's heart sank, but Mr. Hatton only laughed.

"What do you mean by 'scuttlers'?" he asked. "You say that Ephraim Owens, who built the old farmhouse here in Revolutionary days, was one of the original 'scuttlers.' What does that mean, anyway?"

"Why, I don't know!" Becky turned hastily

to the typewritten pages from which she had copied, and began to scurry through them.

"I've heard the word before," said Mr. Hatton. "I believe the people about here use it, or used to use it, as a slang term of some kind."

"Here it is," cried the girl, hastily, handing him a page of the pamphlet. "It's the word that's been written over twice."

"Hm!" mused Mr. Hatton, inspecting it. "Well, it does look like 'scuttlers.' Davis looked into all that pretty thoroughly and, as I have heard the word used around here, he must have put it in for 'local color.' I think it's all right."

"Any of the Owens family still livin'?" asked Lewis, who had been listening to the discussion.

"Yes," returned Mr. Hatton. "I bought the place from Ephraim Owens' grandchildren or great-grandchildren, or perhaps there was another 'great.' I'm sure I don't remember." He returned to the manuscript and, after finishing it, handed it back to Becky, with an approving nod. "Very well done, Captain Becky. That'll suit me if it suits Mr. Downs."

"Did you O K it?" asked Lewis.

"Why, no. Is that necessary?" smiled Mr. Hatton.

"You bet it is!" answered the boy, quickly. "If there's anythin' said that ain't so, or if you ain't

satisfied after it's printed, you ain't got no kick comin' if it's O K'd by you. It's just to protect the reporter that writes it, you see."

"I see," chuckled Mr. Hatton. "Very well." And he wrote "O K—Egbert Hatton" across the first page. "Now you're all fixed up, Captain Becky. If Mrs. Hatton doesn't like what we say about the farm she can blame me instead of you."

"Oh, I'm not afraid," laughed the girl, happily. "And I guess you aren't, either," she added, as Mrs. Hatton smiled at her husband across the table.

Schuyler had obtained the details of Helen Hunt's party by telephone and had written it up with the aid of Lewis. By the time all had finished reviewing their productions it was getting late.

"Well," said Becky, looking down at the pile of manuscript rather doubtfully, "if Mr. Downs uses all that he'll be bankrupt!"

"Not much," retorted Lewis. "Wait an' see. That'll simmer down to not over a column. Are you goin' in to-morrow?"

Becky nodded and Schuyler spoke up:

"I'll take you two in the big car. That'll carry all your stuff, Lewis, and save haulin'. I'm sorry you're going, though."

As the others chimed in Lewis grew red and

embarrassed. He was still flushed and awkward as the good nights were said and Becky went off with Lucile to bed.

At breakfast next morning Lewis was more silent than usual and it was evident that he did not take up his work with unmixed delight, by any means. Moreover, he could never grow used to the presence of the solemn, stately and noiseless butler. As he confided to Becky on the first day of his visit, he felt like "droppin' a rock on his toes to see if he could jump."

Consequently, Schuyler and Becky had to make the conversation, and they managed very well. Lewis was quite cheered by the time the good-byes were said. The touring car rolled up from the garage and Schuyler took the chauffeur's seat himself, after promising his father that there would be no "speeding" on the trip.

"Wait a minute," cried Lucile at the last moment. "I'll get a veil and go along."

Becky sat in front with Schuyler, for Lucile, Lewis and all the possessions of the latter—which were not so numerous—were loaded into the tonneau. A last farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Hatton and the car rolled down the drive.

The trip to town was not an eventful one and the party alighted at the *Record* office without mis-

hap. Lewis, with Becky close behind, led the way past the one-eyed man to Mr. Downs' office.

"Well, well!" cried the editor, as they filed in. "What's all this? A delegation?"

"We're just starting Lewis in right," answered Schuyler, after the introductions were accomplished. "We wanted to be sure he had a good boss."

"Well, are you satisfied?" asked the editor, gravely.

"Kind o'," grinned Schuyler. "I guess you can lick him, all right."

"But sit down, sit down!" insisted Mr. Downs. As there was nothing in sight to sit on, this only provoked a smile from all and Becky hastened to explain her errand.

"I brought you in the 'stuff' you wanted," she said, handing over the roll of paper. In spite of the kindly greeting she felt her heart beating fast and knew that her temples were red. "Maybe you'd better go over it and make sure it's all right," she added, hastily.

Mr. Downs took up the story and settled his spectacles firmly in place. He passed the dance, the birthday party and the first part of the "write-up" of Resteasy Farm without comment. Suddenly he glanced up, a twinkle in his eye.

"Sure about old Eph Owens?" he asked.

"About what?" exclaimed Becky, puzzled.

"Why, you say that he was a 'scuttler,'" answered the editor. "Where'd you learn that?"

"That's what Mr. Hatton's secretary said." And Becky told about the pamphlet and where she had procured the story. "He must have looked things up."

"Anyhow, Mr. Hatton O K'd the copy," put in Lewis. The editor nodded and continued to read.

"Well, he said, laying the papers aside, "this looks pretty good, Miss Beckwith. It'll run a little over a column. I'll send you a check every week, after the paper comes out. Does that suit?"

"Why, yes," responded Becky, confused. "I didn't mean to ask you for the money——"

"I know," laughed Mr. Downs, "but a reporter always feels a whole lot better when he knows about his salary. Turn in as much of this kind of matter as you can. It's good and I'll use it all."

Lewis accompanied them to the car and as they shook hands and wished him good luck he grinned at Becky.

"Bully for you!" he said. "He liked your stuff fine, Cap. You folks drop around sometimes an' see me, won't you?"

"You bet we will," replied Schuyler, heartily.

"And if you get a chance, run out to the farm,"

added Lucile. "Or let us know when you can get away and we'll send the car for you."

"That's awful good of you," responded Lewis, awkwardly, as he thanked her.

"I'll bring in the next batch of stuff to you," smiled Becky. "I hope you make good, Lewis. You may be an owner and editor yet."

"You bet I may!" cried the boy, as Schuyler started the engine. "So long!" And that was the last Becky saw of her Florida friend for three days.

"Where do you want to go?" demanded Schuyler, as the car started.

"Mother wants some curtain stuff changed," said Lucile.

"While you're doing that, Becky and I'll get a soda," returned the boy.

"Yes, you will—not!" retorted his sister, indignantly. "You'll march right along with me, and when I get through we'll all get the soda—and you'll pay for it, too!"

So, after visiting the general store, they turned the car toward a large drug store. As it stopped in front Schuyler jerked his thumb toward the opposite side of the street.

"There's your friend, Cap!"

Looking, Becky saw a grocery store of the old type. In front were three dilapidated chairs and

sitting in one of these was a man. Long, thin, with straggly beard, he was seemingly dividing his efforts between a corncob pipe and a half-whittled stick.

"*My* friend!" exclaimed the girl, with indignation. "I'd like to know what you mean by that!"

"Well, ain't you been writin' about him?" returned Schuyler, with a grin.

"Writing about him!" repeated Becky, mystified. "What do you mean?"

"Why, he's the fellow dad bought the farm from," explained the boy. "Jeff Owens, his name is."

"Well, I wasn't writing about *him*," cried Becky with a laugh, as she sprang to the ground. "I was writing about his ancestor, Ephraim."

"There ain't much difference," said Schuyler. "Since he sold the farm, Jeff lays aroun' town loafin' and tellin' how much coin he's got left."

"Oh!" exclaimed Becky, "I forgot!"

"Forgot what?" inquired Lucile.

"I meant to ask Mr. Downs what 'scuttler' meant," said the girl, disappointedly. "It clear slipped out of my mind. Well, it doesn't matter, I guess. I'll take chocolate, please."

Becky promptly forgot all about "scuttlers" as the talk drifted into the next racing meet to be held at Resteasy Track. Then, all their errands

done, the three returned to the farm. An impromptu tennis tournament was to be held the next day, and Lucile was practicing for it with great eagerness.

Becky did not enter in this tournament, although all urged her to do so, and she was strongly tempted. But she refused stoutly.

"No, I won a prize," she maintained, "and I don't want to carry off another."

"Well, you've got your nerve!" cried Billy Humphrey, who had come over for a game. "Think we're pretty easy, don't you?"

Every one laughed as Becky confusedly explained that she had not meant to imply such a thing. Billy knew this well enough, but she teased Becky until the girl suddenly sprang to her feet and seized a racket.

"Come on!" she cried, impulsively. "If you think I meant that, I'll show you that I might just as well have meant it! I won't go in the tournament, but I'll beat you two out of three sets!"

Billy accepted the challenge with alacrity. Mr. Hatton, who was present, took the judge's stand. Becky, to tell the truth, was just a little angry at being teased so easily and she resolved to play her best.

And she did, too. The first set went to her by a wide margin. In the second Billy only won one

game and, although the third was harder fought, finally Becky captured it, to Schuyler's huge delight.

"All right," laughingly confessed Billy. "I guess you'd better stay out of the tournament. Anyhow, I didn't intend to be mean, Becky."

"I know it," laughed Becky in return. "I was too snappy, I guess."

The tournament the next day was eventually won by Schuyler and Billy, for it was a "doubles." The prizes consisted of two fine rackets.

"You'd ought to have one of 'em," said Schuyler, in a low voice, to Becky, as the party went into the house for supper.

"Nonsense!" smiled Becky. "It wouldn't be fair. Anyway, I don't have to win prizes to enjoy myself."

"Just the same, you should have played," insisted the boy. "The next time you get a chance, you just sail in an' cop everything in sight!"

"All right," replied Becky, "I'll think about it."

Mr. Hatton, too, seemed to think that she should have taken part.

"We could have handicapped you, you know," he declared. "Still, I appreciate your motives, Becky. If we have good weather the rest of the week, so the track will be in shape, we'll hold a

meet on Saturday. I want you to show what you can do this time."

Becky did not reply, in her confusion. She guessed that Mr. Hatton knew something of why she had not won her race at the first meet and she did not press the subject further.

But the races were not to come off as scheduled that Saturday. The next morning, Thursday, set in dark and stormy, and the rain came down steadily all day. Becky wrote letters home and got a start on her next week's story for Mr. Downs. This was to concern the Humphrey farm, which was almost as large as Resteasy, and all the "doings" that went on from day to day in that neighborhood.

On Friday the weather cleared up somewhat, although the day was a gray one. Toward noon the telephone rang. It proved to be Lewis Ahlswede, asking for Becky. The latter ran from the library and seized the receiver.

"Hello?" she called.

"That you, Captain?" came the voice of Lewis, hasty and excited. Without awaiting an answer, he continued. "Say, there's an awful muss down here! We're in a peck of trouble!"

"What about?" cried the girl, a vague sense of impending disaster making her heart sink suddenly.

"Why, that stuff you sent in. You called Jeff Owens' ancestor a 'scuttler,' an' he come after Mr. Downs this mornin' with a club."

"Why, what's wrong?" gasped the girl. "That's what the pamphlet——"

"I guess the pamphlet must ha' meant 'settler,' " returned Lewis. "Come to find out, 'scuttler' is what the folks around here called the guys back in Revolution times who skipped out o' joinin' the army an' hid out till the war was over. It ain't exactly a compliment. You'd better have Mr. Hatton fix things up with Owens if he can. Gosh! he's mad. That's all. See you later."

CHAPTER XII

OIL ON THE WATERS

Becky hung up the receiver and turned with a pallid face to Mr. Hatton, who had heard her excited tones and was standing at her side.

"Well, what's wrong?" he smiled. "Something in the pamphlet, I gather."

"No, it's—it's me," stammered the girl. She explained what the local term "scuttler" meant. "It must have been 'settler,' after all," she concluded, falteringly.

To her intense surprise, Mr. Hatton threw back his head with a laugh, and Lucile, who had heard the explanation, placed her arm about Becky's waist comfortingly.

"Come, come," said Mr. Hatton, reassuringly, "I'm not at all afraid of Owens, Becky. So that's what the word meant, eh? Come to think of it, I've heard that before. I guess there's no great harm done."

"But there is!" exclaimed Becky, helplessly. "Lewis said that Owens went after Mr. Downs with a club and that he was awful mad——"

"You mustn't take him literally," returned Mr. Hatton, with a smile.

Becky saw that Mr. Hatton looked on it more as a joke than anything else, and her dismay increased. She could tell from Lewis' voice, even more than from what he said, that it was not a joking matter.

"But I *know!*" she wailed, despairingly, choking back a strong impulse to throw her arms about Lucile and give way to tears. "I know from the way Lewis spoke——"

She was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Schuyler, who came in with a shout, waving something over his head.

"Here she is!" he cried, exuberantly. "Just come up from the Lodge with the mail. Open her up, Becky."

"What is it?" asked the girl, falteringly, taking a paper from the boy.

"This week's *Record,*" returned Schuyler, beaming. "Why—why, what's the matter?"

Becky had dropped the paper without opening it and, giving way, flung her arms about Lucile's neck while sobs shook her. Schuyler looked on in consternation. Mr. Hatton, realizing that Becky did not look on the happening so lightly, stepped forward and patted her on the back.

"There, Captain Becky," he soothed her,

"don't let it bother you. I approved what you wrote, you know, so I'm the only one to blame."

"It—it isn't that," said Becky, mopping at her eyes, ashamed of her weakness instantly. "Only, it's the very first time, and—and I thought everything was going to be so nice——"

"Well, what's the trouble, anyhow?" asked the puzzled Schuyler, while he tore at the wrapping of the paper.

"We just heard from Lewis," explained his father. "It seems that Jeff Owens is making trouble because we referred to his Revolutionary forefather as a 'scuttler.' The word seems to mean one of the old settlers who 'scuttled' out of the way and remained in hiding until the war was over."

"Golly!" Schuyler looked serious for an instant, and then burst into a laugh as he unrolled the paper. "Say, Owens'll be hoppin' mad, won't he?"

"He won't be," wailed Becky afresh; "he *is!*"

"It doesn't matter in the slightest," declared Mr. Hatton. "I've only seen Owens a few times, but I don't think he'll be apt to cause any trouble."

"I don't know," and Schuyler shook his head soberly. "I've often seen him in town, and he's

a mighty tough citizen, believe me. If he thinks he can sting you for anythin', he'll do it."

"Nonsense!" asserted Mr. Hatton, taking the paper. "Here we are, Captain Becky. Come and see your name in print."

All three young folks crowded about him as he held up the paper. Becky's eyes fell on the sheet and she promptly forgot all about the angry Jeff Owens, for there, placed in the center of the page in large type, she saw the words:

RESTEASY FARM NEWS LETTER

MISS BECKWITH GIVES HISTORY

"Oh, let me see it!" cried the excited girl, leaning forward over Mr. Hatton's arm.

The article occupied a double column from the center to the foot of the page and was signed "Miss Marjorie Beckwith" in large type. A new thrill went through Becky as she gazed at the words. Then she started in to read from the beginning. Her delight ended with a rude shock when she came to the unfortunate word "scuttler."

"Oh, that just spoils it all!" she exclaimed anew in dismay.

"Never mind," cried Lucile. "I think it's all

perfectly lovely, Becky dear! We'll go into town to-morrow, if the roads are good, and see about this Mr. Owens."

Before Becky could reply the telephone bell rang again and Schuyler rushed off to answer it. As the girls gazed at each other in anxious suspense, a sudden premonition struck Becky. Her face paled when the boy reappeared excitedly in the doorway.

"Father! The Lodge just called up and says there's a Mr. Owens down there who wants to see you. Shall they let him by?"

The Lodge was a tiny house beside the gates at the entrance to the driveway, where a caretaker lived with his wife.

"I suppose so," replied Mr. Hatton. "It's better to have it over and settled right away. If Owens is sober, have him sent right up."

"I knew it," exclaimed Becky, in a low voice, "just as soon as the bell rang! Oh, it's awful! I wish I had never seen the old paper!"

"Cheer up!" cried Lucile. "We'll let father attend to him."

"Not much!" returned Becky, indignantly. "It was my mistake and I guess I can stand for it. Anyhow, he can't do very much to me."

"Let me speak to him," said Mr. Hatton, looking from the window. They could see a decrepit

one-horse buggy slowly coming up the drive. "I can handle him without any trouble, Captain Becky."

"No; it's my mistake and I'll make it right," asserted Becky, obstinately. She had no very clear idea of how she was going "to make it right," but she was quite determined that Mr. Hatton should not make excuses for her errors. So, although her cheeks and temples were flaming, she summoned all her courage and met Schuyler's troubled glance with a look of assured confidence which she was far from feeling.

Mrs. Hatton had by this time been apprised of the news and of the arrival of Jeff Owens, and she joined the party in the library. A moment later the stately butler, in response to instructions given him by Mr. Hatton, ushered in the famous Jeff Owens.

The latter seemed dressed up for the occasion, for his straggly beard betrayed traces of a collar beneath. He entered with a stiff bow and a scrape of his head.

"Mornin', folks," he greeted.

"Good morning, Mr. Owens," replied Mr. Hatton, cordially. "Come up to see the farm?"

"No, I reckon not," replied the other, cautiously, his eyes searching the group behind. "I

'lowed I'd have a leetle talk with Miss Marjorie Beckwith, what writes fer the *Record.*"

"Oh, want to see Miss Beckwith, do you?" Mr. Hatton turned and Becky came forward. Her temples were without color, but as Mr. Hatton introduced her she smiled slightly and gazed with her most artless expression straight into the man's eyes.

"So you want to see me? Was it about that article?"

Becky's smile never changed. She had determined to lose no time and have the worst over as soon as possible.

"Why—why, I 'low it was, miss." Evidently her strategy had taken Jeff by surprise. As he gazed into the wide-eyed, smiling face before him, he seemed at a loss for words.

"Well, sit down, Jeff," urged Mr. Hatton, cordially. "We don't want to keep our visitors standing, you know."

"Thanks." And Jeff seated himself awkwardly on the edge of a chair. Rather to the surprise of Lucile, he did not seem at all put out by the splendor of his surroundings. In fact, he seemed to have eyes for nothing but Becky.

"So you're that Miss Beckwith?" he said, slowly. "Why, ye ain't no more'n a girl!"

"What did you expect to find?" laughed Becky, who was now somewhat over her fright.

"Well, I 'lowed you'd be kind o' dried-out like, wearin' specs," he drawled out with a twang. "Excuse me jest a minute."

Rising abruptly, he went to the window, which was closed on account of the chilly morning, threw it up, and spat on the lawn. Mr. Hatton's mouth twitched, his wife and Lucile sat up straight, and Schuyler grinned openly at Becky while Jeff sought his big chair again, settling himself more easily this time.

"Naow," he drawled, slowly, "I kin talk. What in time did ye call ol' Eph Owens a scuttler fer, Miss Beckwith?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Marjorie, with one of her straight smiles. "You see, Mr. Owens, I really didn't know what it meant. I just found out about it this morning when the *Record* called up and told me about how mad you were. I'm awfully glad you aren't really as mad as they said!"

"Hm!" The rangy Jeff looked rather disturbed. "Wall, I *was* kind o' put out," he agreed. "Ye see, miss, that ain't exactly a compliment."

"But it wasn't her fault," interposed Mr. Hatton. He had the pamphlet in his hand and now drew his chair next to that of Owens. "Here we are, Jeff. You see how this word looks? My sec-

retary fixed this up for me a little while ago and as I had heard the word 'scuttler,' but didn't know its meaning, I thought it was correct. So I told Miss Beckwith to go ahead and I'd be responsible."

"But *I'm* responsible," interfered Becky, hastily. "We'll make it right any way you say, Mr. Owens. I suppose the *Record* will make up for it in the next issue."

"I 'low they will," and Jeff grinned. "Shucks, miss, if I'd knowed *you* was the one, I wouldn't made no kick. Ye see, I figgered some one was tryin' to get smart an' I naturally got right sore."

"Why, of course!" agreed Becky cordially. "Anyone would. But it was just a mistake, Mr. Owens. I'm awfully sorry!"

"Don't say no more, miss," returned Jeff. "Fur's I'm concerned it's all right."

A wave of great relief swept over the girl and she caught a look of admiration in Schuyler's eye.

"Better stop and get a bite to eat," said Mr. Hatton to Lucile's ill-concealed dismay while his wife looked troubled. But Owens shook his head.

"No, thanks," he answered rising awkwardly. "I'll git back to town. An' say, miss, if ye want to git anythin' from me, jest you come right ahead. I know 'most all the folks 'round here an'

ef you git stuck when ye're writin' jest you come to ol' Jeff Owens."

"Thank you ever so much," smiled Becky, holding out her hand, which Jeff shook with a terrific grip. "I certainly will, Mr. Owens."

With a parting grin and a scrape to the others, Owens received his hat from the butler and a moment later the front door slammed. Becky sank into a chair while Schuyler sent up a peal of laughter.

"Golly!" gasped the boy, wiping his eyes. "You sure handled him like you knew all about him. Took the wind right out of his sails."

"That's what you did," chuckled Mr. Hatton. "There was fire in his eye when he came in but he went out like a lamb."

"I think it was just fine!" exclaimed Lucile, putting her arm around Becky's shoulders caressingly.

"Why on earth did you ask him for luncheon, Egbert?" demanded Mrs. Hatton.

"Couldn't help it," chuckled her husband, with a sly glance at Becky. "I like to get you and Lucile fussed up occasionally."

"Well, you got 'em goin' that time," grinned Schuyler. "Say, Lewis must be makin' good over there."

"Oh, I hope so!" cried Becky, forgetting her

recent trouble. "He changed my story in places, though. Maybe he had to. I think I'll see Mr. Owens again some time."

"You will? Why, what do you mean?" asked Lucile.

"Oh, just to find out about old times around here," replied Becky. "Maybe he could tell me a whole lot of things I could write about."

"Well, there's luncheon," announced Mrs. Hatton as a gong echoed softly through the house. "You've steered safely out of troubled waters, Captain Becky, so you'll have to celebrate by eating a good luncheon."

CHAPTER XIII

VENETIAN NIGHT

The next day, Saturday, continued dark and threatening. The stormy weather had not only interfered with the weekly races, but had created a dearth of the usual social activities at the farm. This did not trouble Becky very much, for she was busy with her second article, about the Humphrey farm this time. By evening her fingers were well smudged, but her article was nearly finished. With no house guests and no plans to carry out, Rest-easy truly deserved its name over the Sunday.

"Oh, dear," sighed Lucile as they assembled at breakfast Sunday morning, "we haven't had any fun at all! It's going to be a fine day, too." Becky glanced out and saw the sun struggling to break through the clouds, with some promise of success. "I tell you!" continued Lucile with sudden animation. "Let's take that horseback ride this afternoon."

"I don't think you had better," spoke up Mrs. Hatton promptly and decidedly. "A good rest is not going to hurt either of you girls. We can take

a trip in the car this afternoon, if it is fine enough, and you must not forget that you have a social engagement to-morrow night."

The three young people stared at Mrs. Hatton uncomprehendingly. Suddenly Schuyler leaped from the table with an exclamation.

"By golly! I'd clear forgotten all about it. Venetian Night! I guess it slipped away from you, too, sis!"

"I thought of it two or three times," admitted Lucile, "but I always forgot to speak about it. I do wish we had a boat on the lake!"

"What's it all about?" inquired Becky, puzzled. "What's Venetian Night?"

"It's a grand party at the Sunapee Club," explained Mr. Hatton. "It marks the end of the season up here for a good many people. All the boats and launches are decorated, there's a procession, after dark, with prizes for the prettiest boat, and the evening is concluded by a ball at the clubhouse."

"I wish it wasn't so formal, though," remarked Schuyler disconsolately.

"I don't!" cried Lucile. "I'm going to wear that new dress Becky helped me fix up."

For a moment Becky stared at her, the color receding from her cheeks. It had come at last! She had a simple party-dress, but at the remem-

brance of those gorgeous costumes in Lucile's clothespress Becky felt a sudden impulse to withdraw from the Venetian Night party.

"Why," she stammered, as the color flowed back into her cheeks and reddened her temples, "I—I don't suppose I can wear that party-dress of mine, can I? It's all I have, though."

Lucile bit her lips at her own want of tact, but Schuyler at once rushed to Becky's aid.

"Sure you can," he replied stoutly. "You could go just as you are now. You don't *need* fine clothes, Cap."

"I am rather inclined to agree with Schuyler," said Mrs. Hatton, smiling. "I think your party-dress will do excellently, Becky. The ball is a rather formal affair but you may be sure that a good many of the guests will disregard that. After managing a launch all evening it is hard to care about clothes. Besides, everyone will be in the launches or on the big float where the judges are and I wouldn't wear my best dress, Lucile. It is apt to get wet or dirty."

"No, I'm going to wear it," said Lucile decidedly. "I tell you, Becky. You can wear that gray one—the other new one."

"No, thank you," laughed Becky, her momentary dismay gone. "I guess I'll be all right. I read a story once about a man who borrowed a

diamond necklace for his wife to wear to a ball. She lost it and he went in debt to replace it so his friend wouldn't know it was lost. Well, he and his wife worked all their lives to pay the debt and then when the friend found it out he told them that the original necklace was only imitation after all. I've always remembered that story."

"It's a good one to remember," nodded Mr. Hatton. "Well, the sun's out for good, I hope. Get ready, folks."

The family departed in the car an hour later and after a short ride stopped at a little church among the hills which many of the New Yorkers attended while "resorting." They stopped at a roadhouse for a country dinner and returned to the farm after an afternoon ride through the hills which delighted Becky. In the evening Becky finished her article and it was taken down to the Lodge to be mailed. A little later Dusty called up from the lake and announced that he and Jack would take charge of the girls' programs if they wished. Lucile accepted on behalf of Becky, and it was arranged that Schuyler, Lucile, Becky, Jack, Billy Humphrey and Dusty were to occupy the Dustins' new boat, the *Loafer*, which was to be decorated. The older people would be accommodated in the Humphrey boat, as Jack's father had refused to let it enter the procession.

Monday morning Becky recalled something in her story that she wanted to change. Going to the phone, she tried for nearly an hour to get in touch with Lewis at the *Record* office. Finally recognizing the voice of the one-eyed man in the outer office, Becky told him what she wanted changed. Then she added:

"How's Lewis getting along? All right?" she asked, more as a matter of course than anything else. The answer surprised her.

"You don't want the job yourself, do you?" came the metallic voice.

"What d'you mean?" asked Becky. "Isn't Lewis there?"

"Sure he's here," was the reply. "Did you fix things with Jeff?"

"Yes," replied Becky shortly, refusing to be sidetracked. "What's wrong with Lewis?"

"Oh, he's all right," came the answer. "He's out chasin' locals right now. Want him to call you up?"

"No, if you'll attend to that article," replied Becky after considering the matter. "That's all I wanted."

Returning to the library, where the others were gathered, Becky's face wore such a peculiar expression that Lucile commented on it in surprise.

"I'm thinking," laughed the girl, telling of her

conversation with the man in the *Record* office. "I think I'd better go over to East Cornish and see Mr. Downs——"

"Nonsense!" laughed Mrs. Hatton heartily. "Can't you let that poor boy take care of himself, Becky? In any case, you don't know that anything is wrong."

"No," added Schuyler impulsively, "an' you got other folks to bother over besides him. Why don't you work like that for me?"

"Because you don't need it," retorted Becky, "and he does. I think he's nice, sometimes."

"He's nice enough, in a way," admitted Lucile, "but not nice enough for you, Becky. He's positively ignorant."

"Ignorant?" protested Becky vigorously, while Mr. and Mrs. Hatton listened smilingly. "Maybe he is, if you mean in writing and spelling, or not knowing a lot o' things. But I guess he knows a lot that other folks don't, too."

"Meanin' me, and referrin' to settin' type or haulin' ropes," laughed Schuyler but not without a trace of seriousness.

"You know I didn't mean that," answered Becky, her lips trembling and her temples flushing. "I mean the things that make an ignorant boy want to learn, that make him ambitious to know something you wouldn't expect. He may not

be 'nice' like Jack or Dusty, but I'm more interested in him, if that's what you mean. I can't help it and I'm not tryin' to. He's been a good friend to me and I'm goin' to be his friend when I can. If he isn't getting on in his job, that won't stick him. He'll just keep on tryin' till he does."

Becky paused, flushed and breathless after her long speech, the vehemence of which had completely checked the astonished Schuyler.

"That's the way to talk," exclaimed Mr. Hatton approvingly. "Lewis isn't a social light but he's going to turn out a real man. Now, I think I'll end this discussion right here by carrying Becky off to look at those three new Shetlands."

That afternoon Becky and Schuyler had a close tennis match, Lucile being closeted with Briggs. Becky gave little thought to her clothes until dinner time, when she descended in her best dress to the early meal. At Mrs. Hatton's special command, she had allowed Briggs to do up her hair in a new fashion, which not only made her appear older but added somewhat to her appearance and elicited approving comment from Schuyler and Mr. Hatton.

Becky tactfully transferred the comments to Lucile's new gown, and the latter girl, who liked nothing better than to be admired, was soon in a thrill of delight. The characters of the two girls

were admirably shown in their dresses, for the pale blue and old gold of Lucile's gown was wonderfully becoming yet plainly expensive. On the other hand, Becky's plain white dress, touched at the throat with a bit of old lace and also at the elbows, could not have been improved upon for simple beauty. Schuyler was observed to be unusually joyful at her appearance, which fact was explained by a pearl-studded fraternity pin nestling in the lace at Becky's throat. This drew a smile from the Hattons and an appreciative look from Lucile, who had long worn one of the same kind—but not her brother's.

After dinner the party went at once to the waiting car. The evening had turned out to be a fine one indeed and they had an enjoyable ride from the farm to the club. As they turned the corner of the hill and the clubhouse came into sight Becky gave a gasp of delight, echoed by Lucile.

The waters of the little bay on the shore of which the clubhouse lay, already dark, were glowing with lights. The clubhouse itself was decorated with Japanese lanterns, as were the grounds. Lights of different colors danced on the waters and just as they were descending the hill a hissing rocket shot up from the pier.

"Oh, we're late!" cried Lucile in dismay.

"No, we're not," asserted Schuyler quickly.

"That's only the signal for the boats to get into procession. Dusty'll be waitin' all right."

A moment later Louis stopped the car in the center of the crowded court, filled with hurrying people and blinding lights from other cars. Their approach had evidently been noted, for barely had the two girls jumped out when Jack Humphrey dashed up.

"Come on," he panted, then remembered himself, "Good evenin', Mrs. Hatton. The folks are waitin' for you an' Mr. Hatton down at our dock. There's no hurry for you but we've got to get in the procession. It starts from the island. All ready?"

There was a general cry in the affirmative from the three new arrivals and Becky, taking Schuyler's arm, was piloted safely to the pier through the maze of motor cars and swarming people. Here they found the *Loafer* waiting but Becky hardly recognized the boat. Only her riding-lights were lit, and the whole craft was covered as if by a canopy. At each end rose a dark shape that completely changed her whole appearance. They were greeted by a shout from Dusty, however, that speedily showed Becky this was the craft, and the red-haired boy scrambled out.

"Hurry up," he cried, after shaking hands with the girls. "Climb in. Billy's there."

"Is that where we go in?" demanded Lucile, pausing before a square opening in the box-like covering that enveloped the launch. "Why don't you turn on the lights?"

"Tell you later," responded Dusty, helping her inside while Schuyler and Jack assisted Becky. "Throw off the lines, Hump. You take the wheel and I'll 'tend the engine. Got that spare spark plug?"

"You bet," cried Jack, casting the boat loose. The next instant the engine started, he leaped in and they were off.

"Why don't you start the lights?" insisted Becky, seated in a comfortable wicker chair beside Billy. Schuyler sat just behind, with Lucile forward near Jack.

"We're springin' somethin' big," grinned Dusty. "We're goin' to stay dark till we get 'most to the float, over there." Following his gesture Becky could see a blaze of light off the clubhouse, behind them by this time, with a mass of boat lights around it. "You see, we've rigged her up like a gondola, all covered over with black an' gold paper. When we switch on the lights that run all over her she's goin' to blaze up, believe me."

"Oh, I see!" cried Becky in delight. "A real

Venetian boat. Are any of the rest fixed up like that?"

"Not much!" replied Dusty, bending over his engine. "All they've got are flowers or buntin' or lights. We didn't run her over till dark so folks wouldn't catch on."

"Say, that's dandy!" commented Schuyler eagerly. "You ought to cop the first prize, easy. What is it?"

"Searchlight," replied Dusty. "We ran in an extra set o' batteries to make sure we'd have power enough to run all the little lights. That's why we ain't been around lately. We've been workin' some."

Within a few moments they arrived at Goose Island where the procession of boats was forming. There were only a score of boats in the parade, for not all of the owners would enter. Like Mr. Humphrey, a number preferred to sit back and watch, doing their share in the subscription. However, those present were the pick of the Sunapee boats. All except the *Loafer* were brilliantly lighted up and decorated and as Becky watched the shapes flitting past she wondered if the "gondola" could possibly be as pretty as some of the other craft around her.

As the officials bellowed out the numbers, each boat took its place and the procession started

toward the club at slow speed. Down the lake they moved, the three girls in the *Loafer* watching eagerly as the lights of the float and piers and crowding boats drew near. Another rocket went up from the club, followed by more fireworks. With a roar of cheers and shrieking whistles the first boats passed the judges' float. Then Dusty reached for his electric light switch.

"Here we go, girls!"

CHAPTER XIV

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE

With the words, the *Loafer* was suddenly enveloped in a radiance that brought a subdued shriek of delight from Lucile. One minute they were riding unseen in darkness, staring at the brilliancy without. The next, and they were surrounded by scintillating, dazzling color. Becky had only just enough time to realize that the interior of the "gondola" was hung with silks and blazing with lights and that the figure of Dusty looked unaccountably strange, when she was startled by a quick shout from the latter himself.

"Tend the engine, Sky! Lean back, girls—drop off your veils!"

With this the red-haired boy vanished. Looking through an opening behind them, Becky and the others could see him standing on a platform before the queer up-curving stern, an oar in his hand. In the bright lights, reflected twofold from the black and gold trimmings, Becky could easily make out why he had looked so strange.

"Oh!" she cried, obeying his last order as she

turned around, "he's the gondolier! It's all too perfect for anything!"

"Lean back!" ordered Billy Humphrey sharply. "We've got to play ladies, Becky. There's the float."

The startled Becky, suddenly realizing that she was to be a part of the spectacle, felt the color flood her face for an instant. Then she leaned back and tried to look unconcerned as the others. As the *Loafer* slowly passed the float and the swarm of boats, Dusty, using his oar in mimicry of a gondolier and the gorgeous interior of the craft fully revealed to the watchers, a storm of cheers and whistles arose and was echoed from the crowd on the piers and clubhouse veranda. For fully a minute the uproar continued, until the *Loafer* had followed the other boats past the float and drawn up beside the clubhouse dock. Dusty jumped out and then, resplendent in sash, blouse and all, turned to the others.

"I've got to change my things," he cried to Jack. "You take care o' the girls."

He pushed them out once more and vanished. For nearly half an hour the *Loafer,* without her gondolier, sped to and fro, those on board exchanging greetings with other boats and receiving cheer upon cheer as they proceeded.

"Guess there ain't much doubt about our wakin' things up," grinned Schuyler to Becky.

"No, indeed," she returned, glowing with delight. "It's beautiful. Do you think Dusty'll get the prize?"

"Sure," put in Jack happily. "They'll award the prizes later but I'd like to bet who gets the first one. Well, I guess the fireworks are over. Let's go back."

As there was little more to see and the girls were eager to be back at the clubhouse, the *Loafer* was soon at the dock once more. Lucile took Becky to the rooms allotted to the ladies for the occasion and, after a few moments of "general repair work," as Billy Humphrey termed it, all three descended to the ballrooms below.

This was Becky's first ball and it was destined to be a momentous one for her. The men wore evening dress, as did most of the ladies present, and Becky was quite stunned for a time at the gorgeous costumes around her. This feeling soon passed away, however, after rejoining Mr. and Mrs. Hatton. The Hatton party was one of the most distinguished present and the three girls almost at once found themselves the center of a group of eager, excited boys. Dusty and Jack came in for loud congratulations on the decoration of the *Loafer* and, before the dancing began,

the prizes were awarded. The first went to the Dustin boat.

When Becky received her program from Dusty she found it filled with names she had never heard of, while Dusty, Jack and Schuyler had been extremely generous to themselves in the matter of dances. This she was too happy and excited to notice, however, and the dance began in a whirl of gayety such as Becky had never known before.

Suddenly as Becky and her partner concluded a dance, the girl heard a cry of delight go up from the Hatton party near by and saw everyone crowding eagerly around a tall, slender, unobtrusive-looking young man whom she had not noticed before.

"Who's that?" she asked her partner abruptly.

"That?" was the reply. "Don't you know Harold Webster? Come on over. I thought you'd know him sure."

"I've heard a lot about him," responded Becky eagerly. Webster was a special favorite of Mrs. Hatton's, although he had not been at the farm during the summer. He was a star reporter on one of the New York papers, and Becky knew that his appearance was unexpected here. He was not only a reporter, however, but a short-story writer of no little fame and the girl had heard many stories from Schuyler of his deeds in the Mexican

mountains where he had been a war correspondent. So it was with no little excitement that Becky accompanied her partner toward the group.

Webster was just shaking hands with Billy, greeting her with a hearty comradeship that appealed to Becky instantly. As her partner spoke he wheeled around.

"Hello, Jacky, old boy. Glad to see you." He turned with a smile as Becky was introduced. "So this is Miss Beckwith? I suppose I ought to call you that, although I've heard so much of Captain Becky that *that* seems more appropriate."

"And I've heard a lot about you, Mr. Webster," replied Becky, her temples reddening as she met the twinkling, snapping black eyes of the young writer and took his hand. "I'm awfully glad to meet a real writer!"

"Perhaps you can give her some pointers," came a laughing voice, and Becky saw Mr. Downs standing beside her. "How are you, Webster?"

"Pointers?" repeated the writer, smiling.

"Miss Beckwith is doing a bit of writing for me," explained the editor, "and doing it very well too."

Becky grew redder and redder but fought off her embarrassment as best she could, making light

of her work. To her surprise Webster seemed to forget the crowd around him.

"Can you spare me a dance, Miss Beckwith? I just got in, or——" he paused.

"My program is all full," returned Becky helplessly. "Let's see, I have the next dance with Dusty. He has two more—Oh, you see he filled my program for me, so I guess I can take one of his, can't I?"

"You certainly ought to," smiled Webster, his eyes twinkling again at sight of Dusty hovering around. "Three dances are altogether too many for any one person."

"You don't mind, Dusty?" asked Becky anxiously.

"Oh, o' course not," replied the red-haired boy, although his crestfallen air belied his words. "Don't mind me."

"Much obliged, old man," declared Webster and even Dusty's sudden grouchiness could not resist the genial smile that accompanied the words. "There, the music's just beginning."

"Is it true," asked Becky, as they whirled off, "that you helped to fight off the whole rebel army from a train down in Mexico?"

"Hardly," laughed her partner. "You can't believe all you hear, you know. I feel much more at home right here than I did in Mexico."

"It must be fine to be a real writer," almost sighed the girl. With a sudden impulse she began to tell him about Lewis, but before the story was finished the dance was over.

"I say," suggested Webster as Schuyler approached to claim Becky, "let me take you in to supper, then we can finish our talk."

"Oh, good!" cried Becky, delighted. "I'll look for you later, then."

Webster bowed and Schuyler took charge of her hastily as if he feared he might lose his chance. Becky was full of her new acquaintance and discussed him all over again with the boy.

"He always makes a hit," commented Schuyler morosely. "He's 'most thirty, too. Why, half the old ladies here want to catch him for their daughters. Look at old Mrs. Van Brunt over there. She nailed him the minute you let go of him."

"Silly!" laughed Becky, a little embarrassed and wholly excited. "He's just a good scout, as Dusty says. I like him because he's a writer, an' he can tell me an awful lot about writing if he wants to. He's going to take me in to supper."

"Huh!" grunted Schuyler. "I'd kind o' figured on that myself. Oh, well, he's goin' back to New York in the mornin' anyhow. Say, wasn't that parade great, though?"

For half an hour Becky almost forgot about Mr.

Webster in the whirl and crush of the dance. She seemed to meet hundreds of new acquaintances, whose names she could not begin to remember. The clubhouse had been wonderfully decorated with lanterns and flowers whose clusters hid the bright electric lights and gave a delightful softness to everything. Becky saw little of Lucile or Billy save in passing and suffered from no lack of popularity among the younger people. Finally, supper was announced and a moment later she saw Mr. Webster forcing his way toward her. Jack, her partner at the time, resigned her to the writer with small grace, but Becky was too excited to notice it.

"Well," said Mr. Webster, when Becky was settled before the sandwiches, ices and other dainties, "now we can finish our talk. Tell me all about this friend of yours."

So Becky began. She told about Lewis' past history and of how he had started to work for Mr. Downs, concluding by mentioning her fears for his success.

"Some day he'll be a real writer," she concluded, "at least he intends to be. Do you think he can?"

"It's hard to say," replied Mr. Webster gravely. "You see, Miss Beckwith, all reporters can't be writers, and all writers can't report."

"What?" The astonished girl looked up in surprise. "Why, I thought all reporters were good writers."

"No, some of them never succeed in writing," returned the other. "It takes a certain knack for reporting and another for writing. Writing demands ever so much more than mere reporting."

"But you do both," protested the girl.

"That's because I have both knacks," smiled Mr. Webster. "Often a reporter is not able to write up his story or perhaps he cannot get in to the office in time. That is why there are always rewrite men ready."

"What are they?" demanded Becky, staring at her distinguished partner. So evident was her interest that he smiled again. "I don't want to make you talk shop," went on the girl, confused, "but——"

"I don't mind it a bit," laughed the other. "It isn't often I can talk shop to so delightful an audience, Miss Beckwith. The rewrite men are special men who stay in the office and write stories that come in by phone or rewrite the stories brought in by poor writers. Often the very best reporters never write a line of the story that comes out in the paper. They are paid to get the news and they do it."

"But you write your own stories, don't you?"

"Yes, because I happen to be able to. You see, in the newspaper a story must give everything of interest in the first part, then put the details last. But in writing a real story, for the magazines, it's just the other way around. A short story must develop a plot, it must have an introduction, a middle part, and a finish, and a dozen other things. That's what makes it so hard. You have to remember so much as you write."

"Oh, I thought you just started in and told a story," exclaimed the girl. "That one of yours Schuyler showed me, about the Ghetto, just seemed like you started in and went straight ahead."

"So I did," laughed Webster. "But it took me nearly a month to write it, working an hour or two every day. Then I wrote it over again three times and sent it to six magazines before it was taken. I had been practicing writing short stories for so long that I remembered all the little things without trying to."

"I see," replied Becky thoughtfully. "But I don't have to do that when I'm writing for Mr. Downs," and she explained what kind of writing she did. "I just go ahead and tell about it."

"That's altogether different," returned the writer. "You don't have to pick and choose every word as I do and you don't have to tell a news

story like Lewis does. What Mr. Downs wants is just the facts, and that's what you give him."

"But how could I learn to write your kind of stories?" asked Becky.

"So you want to be a writer, too?" laughed Mr. Webster, looking down at her. Neither of them noticed that the dance had begun again and that the dining rooms were being deserted.

"No," answered the girl, "I was thinkin' of Lewis. I know I'd never make a writer if I tried all my life."

"Well, I'm not so sure," replied the other. "You certainly have the personality that a writer needs." Becky was not sure whether he was laughing at her or not, so she continued to meet his gaze and let him continue. "It demands practice, day and night; plenty of experience, and the ability to come up every time you get knocked down, which is often."

"Then Lewis ought to make good," reflected the girl. "He's getting experience and he's a good worker and if he doesn't get discouraged——"

"Well," said Mr. Webster as she paused, "if I can be of any assistance to you or your friend, let me know. I'll be glad to do anything in my power, for from what you say he seems to be an interesting chap."

"That's a promise," cried Becky, her eyes

sparkling, as she sprang to her feet and held out a hand. "Shake hands on it."

Laughing, the writer jumped up, took her hand, and bowed low over it.

"Command me at any time," he replied. "It is certainly a promise, and you mustn't let me forget it."

They were interrupted by an exclamation. Turning in alarmed confusion that sent the fire to her cheeks, Becky saw Billy, Dusty and Schuyler standing behind them.

"My dance," exclaimed Schuyler, advancing. "That is, if you aren't too busy."

"We were just going in search of you," smiled Mr. Webster promptly, with a nod of farewell to Becky. He then moved off and Billy gave a little laugh.

"Too bad to interrupt you, Becky," she cried teasingly. "All the mammas have been looking for Mr. Webster for ever so long."

CHAPTER XV

LEWIS ON THE JOB

"How'd you manage it, Cap?" asked Dusty.

"Manage what?" retorted Becky, her temples flaming. She well knew what they meant but was determined to give them no advantage.

"The way you hooked Harold," laughed Billy good-humoredly. "We couldn't help hearing your last words, Becky."

"You're welcome," retorted Becky coolly and turned to Schuyler. "Are you going to dance with me?"

A moment later she was away from her tormentors and realized for the first time that her interest in the young writer might have been mistaken for a personal one.

"I don't care," she thought defiantly. "We were just talking business and if they don't like it they don't have to." Schuyler, however, displayed unaccustomed tact in not referring to the incident and Becky soon forgot her embarrassment. A few moments later she saw Mr. Downs near by, as they stopped between dances, and in-

stantly her mind flew back to her fears for Lewis. Asking her partner to excuse her while she spoke to "her" editor, she gained the latter's side. Mr. Downs, who was not dancing, turned at the sound of her voice.

"Oh, good evening again, Miss Beckwith," he smiled.

"I want to see you a moment, if you're not too busy," said Becky rather breathlessly.

"Not a bit," returned the editor. "My dancing days are over and I was just thinking of dropping out. I am at your service."

Without hesitation Becky plunged into her story. She told about what the one-eyed man had said over the phone that morning and concluded by asking directly how Lewis was getting on with his work.

"Well," hesitated Mr. Downs, glancing down at her eager face and sparkling eyes, "Lewis doesn't seem to get on quite as well as he might."

"What do you mean by that?" urged Becky, her worst fears suddenly confirmed, but anxious to have full knowledge of the situation.

"Frankly, Miss Beckwith," confessed the editor, "Lewis isn't just the person I've been looking for. He doesn't seem to have the education and he certainly hasn't the writing experience."

"But doesn't he get the news?" inquired Becky. "I thought that was the main thing."

"Yes, I must say that he has a pretty good nose for news," admitted the editor. "But when it comes to the writing he *tries,* and that's about all he does."

"Well," spoke up Becky with a very wise and knowing air, "can't the rewrite men——"

"What?" interrupted Mr. Downs, laughing, "do you think we have any staff like that? Why, my dear girl, it's impossible for a country paper like the *Record* to have rewrite men. No, on a city paper where the office is equipped with a full staff, Lewis would be a valuable news-getter. But with us he is hardly that. I'd like to give you a better report but there's the whole truth for you."

"Thank you, Mr. Downs," answered Becky. "Don't you think he could ever learn to write?" She waited with drawn breath while the editor seemed to hesitate.

"Yes. He could. But, you see, we haven't the time to teach him, here in the country. I am really afraid that I'll have to look around for another man, sorry as I am to disappoint you. And by the way, I'd like to congratulate you on——"

"Wait a minute," broke in the girl anxiously. "Promise to tell me before you let Lewis go, will

you? I'm anxious to help him, and I might be able to get him a city job."

"Oh, I'll keep him another week or so anyway," smiled Mr. Downs. "Then if he doesn't pick up I'll let you know."

"That's a promise," cried Becky eagerly, again unconsciously extending her hand.

"Certainly," responded the editor, giving it a hearty shake. "I'll not forget. But perhaps I've made his case out a little too dark. Sometimes these youngsters find themselves suddenly and unexpectedly, jump right into the swing of it, so to speak. I'm hoping he'll do that. He has his chance to-night."

"To-night?" repeated Becky, puzzled. "How?"

"This is his first real assignment," returned the editor.

"Why, is he here?" exclaimed the girl with eager interest.

"He was, some time ago. He's getting names and descriptions of everything for this week's paper, and seemed to be working hard at it. I noticed him in the reading room with the steward just before I came in here."

Becky remembered Lewis' feeble and ineffectual reportorial efforts on the Melbourne *Times* and she shuddered for the boy. She had somehow begun to feel responsible for him and the fact that

he had been thrown into this most formal, smart gathering with only his Florida experience to guide him aroused all her sympathy.

"I'm sure you could do it better," went on Mr. Downs thoughtfully. "You seem to have the ability to present facts clearly, at least. Your second article came in just before I left the office and I glanced over it to make sure there was nothing more about 'scuttlers.'" He smiled at the girl. "It was really very well done, Miss Beckwith."

But if he expected the girl to volunteer her services for the occasion he was disappointed. She was so much concerned about the hapless Lewis that she hardly grasped the hint and was little interested even in the compliments concerning her Humphrey estate story. At this moment the dance began and Jack Humphrey approached to claim Becky. But, instead of dancing, she asked Jack to take her to the reading room, with so dazzling a smile that the boy eagerly obeyed.

"We've just time to get a breath away from the crowd," murmured the girl. "I wanted you to tell me how you and Dusty fixed up the boat that way. I never saw anything so beautiful before."

With the words, her eyes swept about the reading room. It was less crowded than the dancing

hall but still was comfortably full of resting couples glad to take advantage of the easy chairs.

"Did you like it, really?" replied Jack delightedly. "It was a job, believe me. But we had a lot o' fun out of it."

"It must have taken ever so long to fix up," returned Becky, her gaze roving around. Suddenly, sitting alone in the gloom on the far side of the room, she caught sight of Lewis. His new northern clothes made him seem far from the uncouth boy she had first known but he was yet much out of keeping with the smartly groomed Jack and Schuyler, and the girl gave a little sigh as she guided her escort toward him. "The lights made it seem just like Venice——"

She stopped short as Mr. Webster, whom she had not observed, sprang from a chair beside her with a deep bow. His overcoat lay over his arm and he held his hat ready.

"You're not going?" began the girl and Jack instantly found himself neglected.

"Old folks, you know," laughed the handsome young man, apparently not altogether insensible to Becky's girlish charms. "Yes, I'm afraid I must be going. Since parting between friends should always give pain two good nights ought to be avoided, I suppose."

"Can't you come and see us?" asked Becky im-

pulsively. Then she suddenly grew cold at her thoughtless boldness. But there was no retreat.

"I'm afraid not," smiled the young writer. "I'm stopping over at Cornish with some writing friends and we should have gone back to the city to-night. We're off early in the morning. But I won't forget my promise." He paused, while Jack moved away in disdain. "And to make sure that *you* won't, I wish you'd take my card—my city address."

Becky's fright still made her speechless but her silence meant something very different. As Mr. Webster sought his cardcase her eyes had suddenly lit on Lewis again. The boy still sat in the same lonesome chair, unmoving and so wholly apart from the fashionable idlers around him that the girl was still watching him when her new friend extended a small card.

"Oh, thank you!" she murmured suddenly with a gulp. "It's very kind of you—I know you'll—Mr. Webster, I——" Becky's whole attitude had changed as she paused in confusion, her face red and white by turns.

"What is it?" and Mr. Webster moved toward her. "Are you tired?"

"No," answered the girl nervously, trying to smile. "I'm not tired a bit. I'm just excited. I thought of something—an idea."

"Then I don't blame you," laughed the writer. "Use it before you lose it!"

"I'm going to," went on Becky, breathing hard. "But you've got to help me."

The gracious young man seemed highly amused and not a bit displeased at this bold command. Becky turned to her neglected escort.

"Jack," she requested, "you'll excuse me for a minute, won't you?"

Hump made a poor attempt at a polite bow and Becky turned back to her smiling friend, completely dismissing her escort from her mind.

"You know the boy I told you about?" she began. "The one who's trying to get started in newspaper work?" Mr. Webster nodded. "Well, don't look right away, but he's over there in the corner in that big chair. His editor sent him here to write up the water carnival and dance." Mr. Webster gave every sign of attention. "That's a pretty hard job, isn't it?"

"It all depends," laughed the writer. "It could be done in so many different ways that it greatly depends on what is wanted and the paper that wants it.

"Well, the paper is Mr. Downs' *Record* and the editor wants to have it smart and fashionable."

"Then it isn't so easy. Very good writers are

used in the city on such stories as that—although they aren't always proud of the assignment."

"But Mr. Downs measures things by what the best writers do," said Becky in dismay. "That's the way he's measuring my friend's work. And he told me only this evening that Lewis' job depends on how he can write about this thing."

"I see," mused Mr. Webster. "It does seem rather hard luck."

"No, you don't see at all," exclaimed Becky sharply, intent on making the other understand her point of view. "You promised to help my friend, sometime. I want you to do it *now*."

"You want me to——"

Becky drew a step closer and spoke almost in a whisper. "I want you to write——"

"But my dear Miss Beckwith," protested the writer before she could finish. "I must get off early in the morning! I wouldn't possibly get time to write up this affair."

"That's not what I mean," insisted the girl. "I thought that maybe you could just write something to start it off right——" She paused as the reporter, story writer and war correspondent straightened up in surprise, his smile almost disappearing.

"You see," continued the girl, with a little quiver of her lips, "he can tell all the facts, names

and what it's all about, as well as the boat parade and description. But I just know he can't start it right. Start it for him, won't you?"

The look in Becky's eyes startled the rather blasé young writer as he looked down into them.

"You mean you want me to do a 'lead' for your reporter friend?" he whispered with a return of his quick smile.

"Yes, if that's what you call it. You don't think it would be wrong, or deceiving, do you?"

"It would be certainly misleading," laughed Mr. Webster, "if your friend pretends it's his. But hardly deceiving. It's what is done all the time in the big paper offices and, although it wouldn't be wrong in that sense, it——"

"You'll do it, won't you?" pleaded Becky. "I 'll let you off your other promise, maybe. And maybe it'll get him a regular job. I'll be *so* much obliged if you will!"

"I'm afraid," hesitated Mr. Webster, "it looks too much like presumption on my part, Miss Beckwith. I've had my own leads cut so unmercifully so many times. Perhaps I couldn't do it any better."

"I *know* you can," exclaimed Becky. "Won't you, please? You needn't write much—just a good start. You can do it when you get home, or early in the morning——"

Mr. Webster laughed outright, extended his hand and took Becky's nervous fingers.

"I'll do it to-night and I'll send it to you in the first mail in the morning," he smiled. "And remember, if it doesn't help your young friend I will now feel bound to get him a job in New York, or at least a start. I'm glad to do what you ask, for you've helped me to find something this evening.

"Yes," and he laughed again as he shook Becky's hand, noting her puzzled face at his last words, "you've helped me find a new kind of young lady that you may be sure I won't forget—in my writing business at least. And now good night."

"Good night," repeated Becky, confused and blushing again. Before she could say more Mr. Webster had bowed, turned and disappeared. Dusty instantly took his place but before he could relieve his mind Becky recovered her wits.

"Wait a minute, Dusty. Come over here for a second." Before he could protest she led him across the room to where Lewis sat.

"Lewis," she began in a businesslike way, "when are you going to write up this carnival?"

"Why, hello, Captain Becky!" exclaimed the startled boy, leaping to his feet and shaking hands awkwardly and nodding to Dusty. His eyes swept

the radiant Becky as if he had already forgotten his task. "I s'pose I'll do it first thing in the mornin' while I've got it fresh."

"Well, you won't," responded Becky promptly and decisively, with a mysterious note in her voice. "Don't write a line of it until you get a letter from me and then you do just what I'll tell you. Do you understand?"

"Sure, but hadn't I better——"

"No, do what I say. Have you got all the facts? Names and things?"

"You bet. But I was just plannin' how I'd——"

"You quit planning and wait for that letter from me."

"Yes, but——"

"Now you'd better go home." But her smile and voice relieved her words of their harshness, and Lewis nodded with a puzzled expression as Becky said good night and turned at last to the wondering and impatient Dusty.

CHAPTER XVI

A RIDE IN THE HILLS

In the morning Becky was the first of the household to be up and around. The early mail arrived before nine and, although there was a drizzle of rain falling, she slipped into a rubber coat and darted down to the lodge as soon as she saw the mail arrive. She was determined that Lucile and Schuyler should catch no sight of that letter, for she had been teased so much on the way home about Mr. Webster that Mrs. Hatton had finally put a stop to it for good.

Sure enough, the letter was there, addressed in a scrawling hand that was most disappointing at first. But to the girl's gratification the "lead" was written on a typewriter, and there was a mere note from its writer.

"My dear Miss Beckwith," read the little note. "Here is the lead for the story, with my very best wishes for its success. You have my address and I would be glad to hear how it turns out. Should you ever visit New York please consider that I

am at your service if you have need of a guide. Possibly you would like to visit the Press Club and other points of interest which a Chicagoan (!) might not always see." Instantly Becky's mind flew back to her uncle's parting words at the train. "And, by the way, would you have any objection to your Florida experiences being put into a book? As I hinted to you last night, I have a new and very interesting character whom I might make use of in the future! With all regards to the Hattons, believe me, yours very sincerely, HAROLD WEBSTER."

Abstracting this, Becky slipped the paper into an already addressed envelope, with a note of her own, and left it at the lodge to be sent to Lewis.

Lucile did not appear until noon, although Schuyler and the others were down for breakfast. The day was a dismal one, with a misty rain falling all morning. During the afternoon this cleared off and by evening a red sunset announced that the following day would be a fair one.

There was little activity at the farm during the day. Becky occupied herself in writing letters home during the morning, and for most of the afternoon was absorbed with the pianola in the music room. When the family gathered in the

library after dinner that evening, Schuyler spoke up.

"I say, girls! Let's get up a party to-morrow and take a ride through the hills. Becky wants to see the mountains, and you can't see anything from a car."

"Won't the roads be pretty bad for riding?" suggested Mr. Hatton.

"I don't think so, father," put in Lucile eagerly. "They've had a day to dry off in and you know how quickly these mountain roads get in shape. By to-morrow they ought to be just right. And we haven't had a good ride in ever so long."

Mr. Hatton nodded. Becky's eyes were agleam with interest. "I think it'd be fine," she broke out.

"Do you think you could stand a day's ride?" asked Mr. Hatton mischievously.

"We wouldn't ride all day, would we?" returned Becky in dismay.

"Of course not," asserted Schuyler. "We could start in the morning and take a lunch along. Let's go up past Forest's Corners, Lucile, and take a look at the old quarry."

"And the old deserted house," added Lucile, excitedly.

"Is there a deserted house, too?" asked Becky, her eyes shining.

"Sure!" responded Schuyler. "The one we talked about. Just wait till you see it! Who'll we have, Lucile?"

"Oh, Dusty and Billy and Jack, of course," replied his sister. "Let's get two more and make a party of eight, just for a change. How about calling up Gus von Platen and Cecile Arden?"

"I'll do it now," exclaimed Schuyler. "They're just the ones, too. Gus is a sport when you get to know him."

Schuyler darted out to the telephone booth and his sister turned to Becky with a smile.

"Gus needs some explanation, Becky. He's been in England and acts like a stuck-up."

"Why, Lucile!" expostulated her mother. Mr. Hatton laughed.

"You know it's true, mother!" defended Lucile. "Just the same, he's an awfully good sort, once you get to overlook his affectedness. Last summer he and Sky had a fight over at the lake. Gus forgot himself when Sky teased him, and sailed right in. They've been good friends ever since."

"And who's Cecile Arden?" asked Becky, laughing.

"She is a very nice girl, indeed," put in Mrs. Hatton. "Didn't you meet her at the race last

week? She wore a wide Leghorn hat with a blue bow."

"Oh, yes," answered Becky. "The quiet, good-looking girl with such lovely hair. I remember."

"She's quite a musician too," added Lucile. "Piano, you know."

At this moment Schuyler returned, beaming.

"It's all fixed up! Gus'll bring Cecile over for luncheon, if the weather's good. Jack's goin' to let Dusty know."

"Then you won't start till after noon?" asked his mother.

"Right after," announced Schuyler. "I certainly hope the sun's out."

"But what'll I wear?" asked Becky, in sudden dismay. At the frank question Mrs. Hatton and Lucile smiled.

"That don't matter," interposed Schuyler, hastily. "Gus'll prob'ly have ridin' duds, but the rest of us'll go in sweaters an' leggings."

"Come with me," smiled Mrs. Hatton. "I'll see what I can find for you."

Becky and Lucile followed her upstairs, the former not without some inward hesitation.

"I believe in being sensible up here," announced Mrs. Hatton, as she opened a clothespress. "I allow Lucile to wear divided skirts, and the other girls have taken to it. There is no reason why

women shouldn't ride astride, especially in a place like this."

"Here we are, mother," cried Lucile, dragging out a pile of garments. "These ought to fit Becky, too."

"They look about right," declared Becky, holding a suit against her body. "I'm ever so much obliged for them."

"Don't mention it," laughed Mrs. Hatton, closing the door. "It is only an old suit of Lucile's and you are more than welcome to it. You'd better try it on now, so Briggs can change it if necessary."

Becky hastened to her room and tried on the costume. To her delight, it fitted perfectly. So comfortable was it that she laid it aside with a sigh as she slipped back into her waist—one that she had bought from the Daubigny sisters in Melbourne, Florida. She had dressed to receive some callers that afternoon and had noted more than one approving glance directed at it.

In the morning Becky was up early and was carried off by Mr. Hatton on one of his many special expeditions. It was nearly noon when they returned and she found, sitting on the porch, the two members of the party whom she did not yet know.

Cecile she had met, or rather seen, at the races

and Becky was already taken with the girl's quiet, self-possessed air. Beside Schuyler sat a very tall, lanky youth, clad in extremely correct riding clothes of English cut. He rose and bowed as the girl was introduced.

Just a trifle taken aback by his formal greeting, Becky remembered Schuyler's words of the night before. Reaching out, she seized young von Platen's hand and shook it heartily.

"I'm very glad indeed to meet you," she exclaimed, smiling.

The somewhat startled boy opened his mouth, then shut it suddenly.

"Aw," he answered at last, "chawmed, really!"

"Is that all you can say, Gus?" broke in Schuyler. But at that moment the Humphreys' car rolled up, containing Jack, Billy and Dusty. The party gathered on the veranda with much merriment and laughter.

Soon after luncheon Mr. Hatton called up the stables and ordered eight horses brought to the house. Schuyler, Dusty and Jack were clad in sweaters, while Billy and Cecile had costumes somewhat similar to those of Lucile and Becky.

"Looks as if it might rain," declared Mr. Hatton, standing on the wide steps as the grooms appeared with the horses. "There's a black cloud over the mountains in the south."

"Oh, I think it won't," returned Lucile. "Anyhow, we aren't going to let a cloud scare us back now!"

A chorus of assent went up from the others and, waving a last farewell, the party started down the gravel driveway in great spirits. They rode two abreast, Becky and Schuyler leading. Then came Dusty and Billy Humphrey, Jack and Lucile, with Cecile and Gus last.

"How far are we going?" asked Becky, as they swept out into the main highway.

"Let's see," responded Schuyler. "Forest's Corners is about five miles. We'll go past that up the mountain and then come home by the other road."

This program meeting with the approval of all, they struck into the mountain road a few moments later and were soon among the hills. Becky enjoyed herself immensely. Her horse was a beauty, responding instantly to the slightest movement of the reins, and she had only to drink in the clear, fresh air and keep at the side of Schuyler.

"I'm glad we got Lewis landed safe," said the boy, after a silence. "He ought to make good with Downs."

"I hope he will," replied Becky, absently.

"What's that funny little house away up there on the hill?"

"Nothing but a farmhouse," answered the boy, with a laugh. "They have the barns over on the other side, out of sight from here. We're getting into the valley now that leads up to Forest's Corners. Ain't it great?"

"Oh, it's just beautiful!" exclaimed Becky, as the valley opened out below them and they started down. On either hand lay little farms, the immense New Hampshire hay-barns behind them. All around were the mountains, and Schuyler pointed ahead to a towering mass of granite.

"There's the Corners—that little splotch o' white 'bout halfway up."

"An' there's somethin' else, too," broke in Dusty from behind. "Look back of us."

Becky turned and gave a little gasp of alarm. Rising behind them, with its darkness merging into the hills below and to the west, was a great inky cloud extending nearly halfway up the sky. A chorus of cries went up as the girls saw it.

"Do you think we'll have a storm?" asked Cecile, a trifle fearfully.

"Mebbe," grinned Hump, maliciously.

"Shucks! We won't, neither," declared Schuyler, with confidence. "It ain't heading this way."

"Looks to me as if it was heading every way,"

stated Billy, looking over her shoulder at the slowly moving mass.

"It'll pass over," said Dusty. "Anyhow, we're nearer the Corners than we are home. Go ahead, Sky."

When they reached the Corners, which was merely a straggling village of a few houses and two stores, the sky did not look nearly so threatening. Gus, who had had most of his high manners shaken out of him on the way, urged vigorously that they finish the journey to the top of the mountain.

"You're the only one with any duds to spoil," retorted Billy, "so if you get wet don't blame us! Let's go on."

Becky seconded her willingly and they rode through the Corners with hardly a stop, pausing only to give the horses a swallow of water. Up and up the winding mountain road they went, forgetting everything in the glorious scenery that lay outspread below them. Becky was so absorbed that she did not notice how the sun was gradually fading from sight, until a sudden shadow plunged the valleys below into deeper purple, and the party realized that the storm had *not* passed over.

They were nearly at the mountain crest and the roads, still muddy and heavy from the recent storms, made rather hard going for the horses.

As the sun died out there came a keen puff of wind that brought a gasp from the girls.

"Good gracious!" cried Lucile, in alarm. "There's going to be a big storm!"

"It isn't going to be, either," added Cecile, with a shiver, as a big raindrop splashed on her hand. "It's here! And we——"

She was cut short by a muttering, rolling crackle of thunder, as a jagged streak of fire ran across the horizon. With startled shrieks, the girls pulled up their horses.

"Here's the rain!" cried Becky. "Where'll we go, boys?"

"Go back—and mighty quick, too!" exclaimed Dusty.

"There's a bunch of trees back a little way," shouted Schuyler. "We'll get under them first."

The horses picked their way down the winding, rocky road with care, splashing through the mud until the whole party was liberally bespattered. Crash after crash of thunder rolled around the mountain and the rain came down in blinding torrents.

"This is awful!" gasped Billy, holding on frantically to her saddle and the horse's mane. "Are we almost there?"

"You bet!" returned Jack. Before them loomed a group of trees bent far over by the force of

the wind. Drenched to the skin, blinded by the driving rain and thoroughly miserable, the party gained a temporary shelter at last. Becky slipped from her horse with relief. Although she felt uncomfortable enough, she turned to the others with a smile.

"Well, we're caught," she exclaimed, "so we may as well make the best of it. Isn't there a house or something around here where we could dry ourselves?"

The boys looked at one another and all shook their heads.

"I tell you," spoke up Gus; "Sky and I'll go out and see what we can find. Maybe we can strike something."

"Come on, then," shouted the other, climbing into his saddle. "We ain't got any time to waste fooling around."

The next moment they were lost to sight. Blacker and blacker grew the sky, while the little group beneath the trees huddled close together for comfort.

"Couldn't we start a fire?" suggested Becky.

"No chance," returned Jack, gloomily. "Everything's soaked by now. "We'll wait and see what the fellows find."

"Brr!" shivered Lucile. "Give me your coat,

Dusty—Oh, I forgot you haven't any. I'm freezing to death! Aren't you cold, Becky?"

"Oh, rather," smiled the girl, bravely, although her hands were clenched and blue and her teeth rattled. "We'll soon be out of it, though."

"Cheer up!" laughed Billy, who seemed the most cheerful of any. "Get behind your horses, like Cecile is doing."

That was a good idea, and the boys held the steeds while the four girls grouped together for warmth. Chattering and laughing to keep up their spirits, they waited for what seemed ages, but still no sign came from the two missing boys.

"We can't wait here all day," grumbled Dusty at last. "I'm goin' after them."

"No, you won't!" cried Billy, sharply. "You stay right here."

"We can't afford to lose you, too," laughed Cecile. "This storm shows no signs of letting up. Maybe we'd better all go together. We can't very well get any wetter than we are now."

This suggestion seemed to meet with grudging approval, and the girls were just turning to their horses when Jack gave a shout.

"There they come! No, there's only one. By golly, something must have happened! Gus ain't with Sky!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

Approaching through the rain was a single horse. The next moment all saw that it was Schuyler and a general cry went up.

"Where's Gus?"

"Here he is," cried that young man's voice, and his head appeared over Schuyler's shoulder. Then it was seen that he was riding behind the other boy, and as the two came up there was an outburst of excited questions.

"The blamed old horse got scared at the thunder an' threw me," explained Gus, who was now entirely restored to the normal speech and attitude of an ordinary mortal. "Sky had a job findin' me. The horse made tracks for home. Went down the mountain like a streak."

"Did you find any house?" inquired Becky, whose momentary alarm had now subsided. The two shook their heads.

"Nothin' doing," responded Schuyler. "We got to go clear to the Corners unless——"

"The deserted house!" broke in the girl. "Where's that?"

"Sure!" shouted Schuyler. "I forgot about that. We didn't get that far, anyhow. She's only about halfway to the Corners. Come on!"

"Is there a real deserted house?" asked Cecile, as the girls climbed into their saddles slowly and heavily.

"More'n that," answered Schuyler, cheerfully. "It's haunted."

"Haunted!" A general exclamation arose from the four girls. Dusty and Jack nodded emphatically.

"Come along," ordered Schuyler. "I'll tell you about it as we go."

"But I'm not going to any haunted house!" cried Lucile.

"Nor I! Nor I!" added Cecile and Billy together. Becky alone kept silent. Despite their words, the girls began to urge the horses down the steep and muddy road. As they picked their way, Schuyler drew into the center of the group and related the story.

"It's a peach of an old place," he said, somewhat jerkily. The horses could only proceed at a slipping walk, for with every moment the condition of the road grew worse. "There was an old woman lived there, the last o' her family, I guess. Anyhow, she died 'bout four years ago. Her nearest folks lived down at the Corners, and

they always seemed to be mighty curious people. She left the place to them, o' course, but there'd been bad blood between 'em, and she put a lot o' queer conditions into the will.

"The relatives tried to bust it, but they couldn't. It made 'em so sore that they not only wouldn't accept the place, but swore never to set foot inside it till the house crumbled. They pay taxes on the place, though."

"And haven't they ever visited it?" asked Becky, breathlessly.

"Not them," laughed Schuyler.

"Hasn't anyone ever been there?" put in Gus, who was taking turns riding behind the others.

"Not on your life!" chipped in Jack, emphatically. "The people say the spook of the old lady comes out and plays the piano at night. You couldn't get 'em to go within ten feet o' the front gate."

"Comes out and plays the piano!" repeated Cecile, puzzled. "Out where?"

"You'll see in a minute," chuckled Schuyler. "We're 'most there now. It's just behind that bunch o' trees, back from the road a piece."

"What time is it, anyhow?" asked Lucile, wearily.

"Pretty near six," responded her brother, after

looking at his watch. "I'd no notion it was so late."

"Six!" exclaimed Becky. "Why, it can't be!"

"It is, though," declared Dusty. "We wasted a lot o' time waitin' around for Gus an' Sky. Then the climb up the mountain took considerable time."

As the road swept around a shelf of the mountain the haunted house came into view. It was nearly hidden by a thick clump of trees, and the party had been too much occupied to observe it on the way up the mountain. An old and unused drive turned in off the road and up this the cavalcade proceeded, somewhat fearfully. Then the house itself came into full view.

It was an ancient Colonial mansion, with thick high pillars in front and at one side a broad gallery or veranda. This gallery was protected by a huge trellis work, on which thick vines were clustered, shutting out all within from the view of the party. With a sigh of relief the four girls slipped from the weary horses and the boys started with the latter for the barn which showed behind the house.

Becky led the way to the shelter of the wide and somewhat rickety gallery. When she gained it she halted on the top step with a gasp of mingled amazement and delight. Instead of the wide

open porch she had expected, the fading daylight revealed what seemed almost an outdoor room. In one vine-sheltered nook appeared a wide, old-fashioned fireplace of stone, still containing a half-consumed log. At the other end of the curious porch stood a weatherbeaten upright piano, its top open to the elements and its ivoryless keys hanging brown and loose.

The girls clustered on the steps in awed silence. There seemed to be an air of mystery about the old place, an air of quiet expectation strangely at variance with the rage of the storm outside.

"Well, what are you waitin' for?" demanded Dusty, as the boys returned from the barn on a run.

At this the girls mounted the gallery, with the four boys crowding behind them. The rain was still coming down in sheets.

"There's the spook piano," exclaimed Schuyler. "They say the old woman comes out here at night whenever she takes the notion and plays a bit just to cheer herself up."

"Stop it!" cried Lucile, with a little shiver. "Ghost or no ghost, I can't go out in that storm again."

"Oh, well," explained Jack, easily, "there isn't any ghost, of course. That's all silly nonsense. I guess the piano plays, all right, but it's

the vines swinging against the keys, or the wind, or the birds."

As they advanced, the girls could see a door set in the wall, not far from the fireplace. It was a low, broad door, set half its length with queer old diamond-shaped panes of glass, and uncurtained. Becky, feeling not a little nervous, approached and looked through the dusty panes.

"Why, some one lives here!" she cried. "It's a regular house inside. Everything's there, pictures and all."

"That's what the old woman left," explained Dusty. "The folks ain't never touched a thing, I guess."

"Let's go in," suggested Hump, boldly. "Break in the door."

At this Becky drew back in alarm. Schuyler, however, pushing past her, seized the corroded brass knob.

"It ain't even locked," he said, scornfully, and he opened the creaking door. Becky's curiosity got the better of her fear and she followed him instantly into the musty hall, the others crowding behind. In the gloom they made out a stand on which stood two dusty candlesticks holding yellowed candles, one of which was bent double, as if with heat.

"Light one of the candles, Hump," cried Schuyler.

The other promptly obeyed. The candle spluttered and flared up as if it were made of the newest paraffin, and Schuyler lit the other. Then, holding his light high above his head, he stepped over the creaky floor to an open door in one side of the wall. Becky sprang to his side with a cry of delight.

In a far corner of the room behind the door was a big four-poster bed, from the top of which hung a faded silk canopy. As if prepared for immediate occupancy, a knit white coverlet was spread smoothly over the couch and two pillows stood stiffly at the head with an old-fashioned bolster below.

"Why, it's just like some old Colonial picture!" exclaimed Billy, as all gazed around. Becky was too delighted to speak.

"Look at the darling little fireplace!" cried Lucile, pointing to one side of the room. "It looks as if the bricks had just been gone over with red brick dust."

"And the fire's all laid, too," added Lucile.

"Hello! That's funny!" suddenly cried Gus, pointing to the carved wooden mantelpiece over the fireplace. There they saw a square clock of some dark wood.

"What's funny?" asked Lucile.

"Why, the clock! Look at its hands!"

Becky gave a little gasp as she saw that the two hands were pointing to twelve o'clock. Then a light darted into her eyes and she moved behind the others, who were gazing at the clock with no little awe.

"Do you suppose that means ghosts?" queried Gus, a trifle huskily.

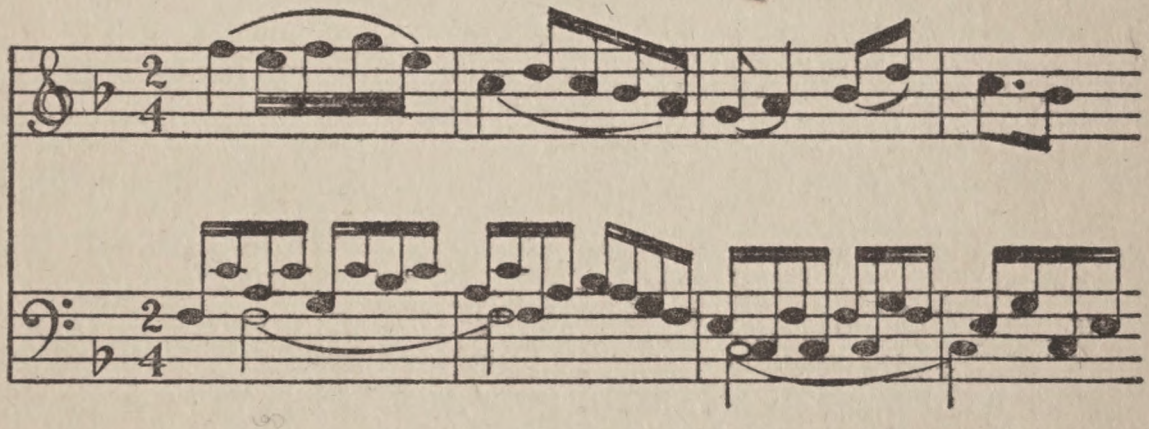
"Nix on ghosts," laughed Hump. "It just happened that way, that's all. Say, look who's here!"

As he held his candle aloft, regardless of the melted wax that dripped on his wet clothes and on the old-fashioned carpeted floor, all saw an oil painting on the wall above the clock. It was heavily framed and showed the portrait of the face and form of a middle-aged woman in Colonial costume. Her hair was dressed high and powdered, a filmy lace kerchief was about her neck and in her hands was an ivory fan.

Schuyler advanced to Hump's side and both held their candles close for a better view of the picture. Behind them were grouped their silent, wet and shivering companions. Just as the pictured face came into better view, a chord of sepulchral, hollow music sounded in the distance. There arose one frightened cry of alarm. Then followed

a mad stampede of frightened boys and girls toward the door.

"Stop!" cried Schuyler, trying to bar the way. "Hold up! Don't get scared!"

Even as he shouted the low chord came again, drifting in from the old piano. The party huddled together, afraid to stay and yet afraid to venture out on the porch. Faint but distinct, the notes came:

"Good gracious!" gasped Cecile, the only one who recognized it. "It's from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*—the ghost opera, you know!"

There could be no mistake. No swinging vine could make that sure, measured cadence, breaking off so abruptly. At the words of Cecile, Schuyler's candle flickered out. There was an instant shriek from the girls. Then the boys timorously edged toward the door and Schuyler peeped out.

"Why, there ain't nothin' there!" he announced

in a low, startled voice. "The skeleton of the old piano——"

"Take a light there! What's the matter with all of you?"

It was the voice of Becky from the room on the opposite side of the hall in which the frightened group stood. "I thought you were coming in here," she went on. "This is the living room."

"Did you hear the music?" gasped Billy.

"Come back!" pleaded Lucile. "Don't go in there!"

"Sure, I heard it," replied Becky. "It was a bird or a vine, wasn't it?"

"Birds don't play Mozart chords," shivered Cecile, with a smothered sob. "I want to go home."

"Pshaw!" cried Becky as Schuyler's candle flared up again. "Let's stay. I think it's a lark. I'm just crazy about ghosty houses. This——"

Before she could say more, muffled sounds as of footsteps came from the floor above. That was the last straw. In another moment the entire party was gathered on the gallery outside, the girls clinging to one another in a frenzy of terror. There was a sobbing vote to fly at once in spite of the rain, mud and night. Only Becky dissented.

"We never would get home through all that mud and wet," she urged. "What's the matter

with all you folks? You aren't scared of an old ghost, are you?"

"We might build a fire out here," suggested Schuyler, somewhat doubtfully, emboldened a little by Becky's words. "There's wood in the bedroom, all ready to light. Then we could get dry, anyway. We could figure out what to do next a heap better if we got dried off."

"I don't want to get dried off," sobbed Lucile, shamelessly. "I want to get away from here."

"So do I," confessed Dusty and Gus together.

"But there must be a kitchen," urged Becky, "and it's only half a mile or so to the Corners. Why don't you boys chase over there and get something to eat? We can cook it right here or in the kitchen——"

"Fine!" ejaculated Billy, who was herself again. But a chorus of vehement dissent arose from Cecile and Lucile. Dusty and Schuyler sided with Becky, while Gus and Hump remained undecided.

"Well, why shouldn't we?" argued Becky. "It's lots better than a hotel!"

"I'm afraid!" confessed Lucile, frankly, although she had ceased crying.

"And I won't stay here if a single boy leaves," declared Cecile, firmly.

"A lot of good they'd be!" said Billy, con-

temptuously. "Look at Gus — see his knees wiggle?"

"They don't, either!" retorted that individual, indignantly. "I'm not as scared as you are, Billy Humphrey! Only we can't see your knees shakin'."

"You look a whole lot worse, anyway," rejoined the girl, with a laugh.

"We just *can't* stay here!" broke in Cecile, with a wail. "Let's go home."

"And break the horses' legs on that slippery hill?" argued Becky. There was no answer to that, and Cecile was silent. "Well," continued the girl, "if you're all scared to let the boys go after some stuff to eat, keep 'em here. I'll go myself."

"And I'll go with you," spoke up Schuyler, quickly.

"You shan't!" came a new feminine wail. "She just wants to get away! You've both got to stay right here!"

"No, we don't," returned Becky, grimly. "You stay here, Sky. I'll go alone."

"But the boys can't go!"

"Neither can she," declared Schuyler, suddenly. "I'm goin' through the house first."

"You mustn't!" shrieked Lucile, catching him

around the neck. "You'll be shot or stabbed or something! I know you will! You mustn't go!"

"By golly, I'll make a fire, anyhow!" exploded Schuyler, tearing himself loose. "I'm not goin' to stand around shiverin' all night."

And, to the great alarm of all except Becky, who alone seemed to have a smile on her face, Schuyler relit his candle. "Come on, Captain Becky," he grinned, "we'll take a look around the place."

The two disappeared amid a chorus of protests from the three girls remaining, even Billy adding her voice. A moment later they reappeared, carrying the long-preserved firewood in their arms.

"She's stickin' mighty close to Sky," grinned Dusty to Hump. "She's makin' a mighty good bluff at not bein' scared, all right!"

"Get the fire goin', you two loafers," ordered Becky, catching the grin. "If we've got to carry out the stuff, you can get busy making the fire."

The two boys fell to work at once. Setting the kindling against the old, dry and crumbling log, Schuyler touched a match to it. The fire blazed up at once, sending out a pleasant warmth that quickly drew the shivering group around it. The railing and trellis work that shut in the gallery from the weather was largely rotted and falling away. Tearing away portions of this, the boys

soon had a cheerful blaze going that promised to dry them out without loss of time.

As their spirits returned, the talk of what to do next was resumed and an animated argument resulted.

"It isn't right to stay," insisted Lucile at last. "I know father and mother won't like it. We've *got* to go to the village, anyway, Sky, and—but where is Sky?"

"And Becky!" exclaimed Dusty. "They've gone!"

A series of calls, screams and sobs arose.

"Go find them, you boys," cried Lucile. "Something awful will happen!"

"Where can we go?" returned Hump, uneasily. "I didn't see 'em."

"Maybe they're in there," suggested Cecile, pointing with an alarmed gesture toward the dark hallway bedroom.

Jack made a faltering start toward the door, but just then, out of the far end of the black, rain-swept gallery where the skeleton piano stood, there was the ghostly movement of a white, misty form, and again sounded that gruesome chord from the "ghost opera." Even before the terrified group about the fire could throw themselves together, the ghost-like white seemed to dissolve and melt into the darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XVIII

"WHERE'S BECKY?"

A startled shriek went up anew from the girls. Hump was already poised on the top steps, afraid to remain and ashamed to run. Dusty and Gus hovered near in indecision.

"What on earth was that thing?" muttered Dusty.

"I know it was the ghost," sobbed Lucile, breaking forth anew into tears, as did Cecile. "We all saw it, too!"

"Nonsense!" spoke up Gus, although there was a quaver in his voice. "There ain't any such thing as ghosts. What we saw was prob'ly an old newspaper or sheet or something blowing in the wind."

"Newspapers don't fly around up here—or sheets, either," wailed Cecile. "And they don't play the piano like that. I want to get away from here! I know we'll all die!"

"Don't be foolish!" snapped Billy, decisively. "We've got a good warm fire here and I'm not going out into that storm again. Go on home, if you're so scared. I won't."

"Oh, Billy!" cried Lucile, in alarm, "I hear steps! The ghost is coming!"

There was another stifled shriek from Cecile and a startled movement from Billy. As Jack started down the steps in frightened haste he collided with a dark form and fell back with a yell of terror.

"Here, what's eatin' you?" came the voice of Schuyler, scornfully. "I ain't no ghost! Get out of my way, you lobster!"

"It's Schuyler!" went up the cry. "Where's Becky?"

"How do I know?" retorted the boy, crowding forward to the warmth of the fire, where his dripping clothes began to steam. "I've been out looking after the horses. We forgot to rub 'em down. Isn't Becky here?"

"No, she's gone," wailed Lucile, hopelessly. "And the ghost was here and I just know it carried her off!"

"Oh, shucks!" cried the boy, in disgust. "You're all a bunch o' boobies. Wait till I get warm, an' we'll find her, all right."

"Mebbe she's in the house," volunteered Dusty, cheered by Schuyler's appearance and evident scorn of the ghost. "Let's go and find——"

"No!" cried Lucile, in alarm. "We'll stay right here! Don't you dare try to go in there!"

"The ghost came right out and played the piano in front of us," explained Cecile, with a shudder. "We all saw it and heard it."

"Now, look here!" burst out Schuyler, losing patience. "You've got to forget this ghost business. You're just a lot o' babies! Becky's not lost. Like as not she's gone to the Corners for grub. She said she would. Hump, quit wabblin' your knees! Want me to knock your head off?"

Brought down from ghostly dangers to real ones, Jack forgot his fear and started toward Schuyler threateningly. Billy caught his arm with a laugh.

"Cut it out, Jack—he's only joking." Schuyler's grin confirmed her words.

"Come on," said Dusty. "Maybe Becky is in the house."

"Let's all go in and beat up the ghost," suggested Gus bravely.

"I won't!" cried Lucile, sharply, seconded by Cecile.

"Then we'll leave you here with the piano," threatened Billy as she arose. This was too much and the two frightened girls got to their feet.

"I'll lead the way if you want to search the house," volunteered Schuyler. "Where's that candlestick?"

He found and lit it, and then led the way to the

door with the diamond panes. Behind him came Dusty and Jack, followed by Billy and Gus. Lucile and Cecile brought up the rear, trembling and pale-faced, tears still streaking their cheeks.

Schuyler paused before the mantelpiece, holding up his candle, with a grin at the picture.

"No use, old lady," he exclaimed cheeringly. "You can't throw any bluff into this crowd! We've got your number this time."

Dusty seized his arm. "What's that noise?"

In the dead silence of the musty old room could be heard a loud "tick-tick." Schuyler glanced at the clock, the others following his gaze.

"The clock's running!" cried Billy in surprise. The old-fashioned pendulum was beating back and forth in its little square opening.

"The ghost started it again!" declared Jack shrinking back.

"Come off!" snorted Schuyler.

"Walking around has set it goin', maybe," volunteered Gus.

"But the hands were at twelve o'clock," returned Schuyler in perplexity. "Now they're at seven fifty. That's just the time it is now, too," he added after a glance at his watch. "That's mighty queer, fellows. Ghosts can't set clocks. It's a cinch some one's been around here. Maybe Becky started it."

"That's right," cried Hump with new courage. "Spooks can't monkey with machinery. If it ain't a ghost we needn't be scared. Come on, let's go through the old place."

All tiptoed after Schuyler toward the farther door opening into the living room. Gus had now lit the second candle and there was no lack of light. As Schuyler stepped past the doorway there came a new sound. It seemed like a sigh, as if something had passed through the air in the upper part of the room.

"What's that?" gasped Billy, shrinking back and clutching Cecile.

"Prob'ly a bat or somethin' in the dark," suggested Dusty.

The girls trembled anew, refusing to accept his explanation. Even as Schuyler began a cautious advance, out of the air came the distinct words:

"I died at midnight. When the clock strikes twelve, beware!"

The words died away in a shuddering whisper that struck the listeners dumb with horror. Too frightened even to scream, the girls turned and fled back to the gallery, followed closely by the four boys.

"Oh!" whispered Lucile, her arms around Billy and her head buried. "Oh! I'm—I'm afraid——"

"There, there," Billy soothed her, although her

own face was ghastly white. Cecile was sobbing unrestrainedly. The boys, pale and frightened, stood about irresolutely, not venturing to speak. Even Schuyler's assurance had departed for the moment.

"By golly," he muttered at length, "no mistake about that, was there? It sent my hair straight up!"

"Here, too," confessed Dusty frankly.

"What are we going to do?" wailed Cecile weakly. "I'm almost starved! Is the storm over?"

"Not much," asserted Hump, turning. "The rain isn't so thick but it's driving before the wind like everything. We've got to stay here I reckon."

"We can't go on like this, though," declared Schuyler resolutely. "We haven't had any grub since noon an' I feel empty. I'm goin' to finish gettin' dry, an' then——"

"And then what?" inquired Lucile faintly as he paused.

"Go to the Corners and find Becky and get some grub," he announced in a firm voice.

"You can't go away!" cried his sister in alarm. "Don't let him go, Billy!"

"All right," and Billy calmed her quietly. "He

won't go, dear." At her appealing look Schuyler, huddled before the fire, nodded reassuringly.

"No, I'll stay, Lucile," he said soberly, to remove his sister's almost hysterical fears. "But we got plenty o' fireplaces in there, an' prob'ly plenty of rooms where there ain't any ghost. You girls could take one o' them when it got warmed up an' maybe we could find some clothes around here——"

He was cut short by a vigorous protest from Cecile and Billy together.

"Not for mine," declared the latter firmly with a shake of her head. "Let the ghost wear her own clothes. I prefer my wet ones."

"Well, we've got to find Becky anyway," asserted Schuyler. "What if something has happened to her right here in the house? She may be shut up in one of the rooms."

"Who'd shut her up?" demanded Hump skeptically. "The ghost?"

"Why she might have shut the door an' then found it had a spring lock," was Schuyler's reply. "Didn't you ever read of cases like that? I have, lots o' times. But I'll bet she's buyin' 'eats' at the Corners."

"The ghost hasn't actually hurt us, for a fact," admitted Gus. The party was by this time fairly

dry, for although a little rain blew across the gallery the thick vines shielded it well. The girls were more composed as they grew warmed, and finding that the discussion was leading nowhere, Schuyler sprang to his feet.

"Well, who'll come with me to go through the house? We can try that."

"I'm on," announced Gus relighting his candle.

"Count me in," said Dusty, while Hump nodded. But the girls at once set up a dismayed protest.

"You needn't think you're going to leave us here," cried Billy. "Come along, girls! We'll all hold hands and let the boys go first."

The faint protests of Lucile and Cecile were quickly overruled. Gus and Schuyler, with candles flaring, started bravely through the diamond-paned door into the dark hall. Hand in hand the others followed, starting afresh at every creaking board.

The living room, which was sparsely furnished and hung with one or two old prints, opened into the hall. Beyond this they found a flight of stairs before them. As they started down the hall the party stopped suddenly. A faint rustle came to their ears.

"What's that?" cried Cecile in new alarm.

"Sounded like clothes," answered Dusty wickedly. "Maybe the ghost is on the way——"

"Nonsense!" sneered Schuyler as the party halted abruptly. "Ghosts don't have clothes. They can't rustle 'em, anyhow. Come along."

The ascent of the stairway was stealthily begun, the two candles throwing a weird, flickering light over the curious pictured wallpaper and darkened steps. The stairs creaked underfoot and the air was close and musty but there were no further ghostly signs and the girls gradually plucked up some courage.

"My, what a big hall!" cried Billy as the landing above came into sight.

"More pictures, too," added Schuyler holding up his candle. "There's the old fellow that built the house, prob'ly."

He pointed to a large portrait at the head of the stairs directly facing them. It represented a soldier in a revolutionary uniform, his hair powdered and tied behind in a cue and his face not ill-looking. The lower part of the frame had dropped away and cobwebs dimmed the features. Beyond this picture hung an old English color print, showing a coaching scene.

"Just think of that fine old painting rotting away here!" exclaimed Cecile indignantly, her taste for art getting the better of her fears. She

brushed away some of the cobwebs and examined the portrait more closely.

"That's a good lookin' sword he's got on," declared Schuyler. "Let's be movin' along."

"There's a big picture over there," exclaimed Gus as the party turned from the man's portrait.

Across the hall stood an oblong frame of dimmed gold. In it was another portrait, that of a woman garbed almost as the figure in the bedroom painting had been dressed and nearly life size. Little cries of surprised delight went up from the three girls.

A wide sweeping hat almost concealed the face of the figure and, from a high waisted gown of flowered silk, the skirts spread out like a parachute. It was a three-fourths figure, the feet of the subject not showing.

A black Spanish shawl was draped over the shoulders of the woman, whose back was partly turned. One white, rounded arm extended to the side. In the exposed hand was what seemed to be a closed fan of ivory.

The little band of adventurers, still trembling from their last fright, paused in admiration. Gus advanced with his candle aloft while the others followed, their eyes straining to catch the details of the attractive picture.

"Must 'a' been a swell dame," volunteered Jack.

"Certainly aristocratic," whispered Lucile in open admiration, almost forgetting to be afraid.

"Look at that arm," exclaimed Schuyler. "That's some paintin'! I guess it's the old lady when she was a girl."

"It's a half-Colonial costume," added Cecile, "or rather, before the war. Isn't it lovely, Billy?"

"Beautiful!" added that person, half closing her eyes critically. "I only wish it showed more of her face."

"Why don't you girls wear dresses like that?" inquired Dusty from behind. "I reckon that's what you call a real blue-blood!"

"English, maybe," said Gus, remembering himself and assuming his old pose. "I beg your pahdon, girls, but I must take off my hat to the 'Lady with the Fan.' She's ahbsolutely a peach!"

As he spoke he stepped closer to better light the dim figure. Then he held the candle high. As he lifted his half-dried sombrero with his other hand and bowed he gave a sharp cry as of pain. At the same moment his candle dropped and in the deepened gloom, Gus gave a second startled yell and sprang for the stairs. No one waited to ask what had happened. As the boy reached the stairs and plunged down them three steps at a time, the girls followed in a panic of new shrieks and moans.

Dusty, thrown off his feet by the rush of startled, shivering girls, bumped into Hump and both went sprawling into a corner. The girls scrambled downstairs in mad haste. Schuyler alone kept his head, following more slowly and lighting the way with his candle.

When the front porch was reached again fear gave way to what was almost hysterics.

"It hit me," gasped Gus as he partly recovered his breath. "She smashed me on the cheek with that fan!"

"It hit you?" repeated Schuyler grasping the panting boy by the shoulder. "What?"

"She smashed you?" broke in Dusty rubbing a bruised elbow. "You're gone crazy. Who's she?"

"The picture!" explained Gus, shaking himself loose from Sky. "I tell you it did—right on the jaw—the fan!"

"How could it?" demanded Billy making her way forward. "I didn't see anything. I was watching!"

"I tell you it did or *she* did," protested the distraught Gus. "Don't I know?" he shouted angrily. "Couldn't I feel it? Right here!" The almost shivering boy pointed to his right cheek.

"Not a mark," announced Schuyler as he held his candle close. "Folks," he added with a smile,

"something's got to be done with this guy. He's out of his head. Unless," and his face sobered, "there is a ghost, after all."

"Ghost or not I got a whack," persisted Gus. "If you don't believe me why don't you all go back and try it yourself?"

"I'll go," announced Schuyler. But there were no volunteers, although, taking Gus' dead candle he relit it and started toward the empty hallway.

"You shan't," moaned Lucile. "Oh, it's terrible. What shall we do?" Then throwing her arms about Billy she buried her head on the other girl's shoulder. The storm still continued and even seemed to be growing worse. By this time the roads would be impassable for the horses and even the girls could see the impossibility of trying to proceed home.

"Oh, it's awful," moaned Lucile. "The house *is* haunted."

"It's worse than haunted," added Cecile despairingly. "It's a regular chamber of horrors! What *will* we do?"

"Couldn't one of us go down to the village and telephone over to Resteasy?" suggested Jack. "Or over to my folks. They're sure to be worried about us. They could send a car."

"Sure, that's the——" began Dusty, but Billy interrupted him.

"You'll stay right here, all of you," she declared firmly. "Build up this fire and we'll sit by it until the storm blows over. Maybe Becky'll be back soon."

Schuyler did not argue. He at once gathered more of the broken and rotted trellis, while Jack and Gus went to the barn to feed the horses and find more wood if possible.

CHAPTER XIX

A RESCUE.

"Well, this isn't so bad," announced Dusty a little later. The party was sitting around the blazing fire—the boys having found some split wood in the barn—and all were dry and comfortable. The girls were somewhat drowsy and as no further tokens of the ghost's presence had been heard or seen they had regained their customary spirits.

"If we only had something to do," continued the boy, "we could make the time fly a heap quicker. I wonder if there are any cards inside?"

"Go and see if you want to," returned Hump dryly. "I'm satisfied."

"I'm worryin' about Becky," said Gus. "Why don't she come back?"

"Don't ask," shuddered Cecile with a nervous glance around. "I'm afraid to think about it."

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed Schuyler. "She's prob'ly been waitin' for the rain to let up. I expect she's on the way back now."

"But she didn't go out this way!" returned Lucile despairingly.

"Well, ain't there other doors to the old house?" retorted her brother sharply. "You girls give me a pain."

"That'll be enough from you, Sky," said Billy heatedly. "You're the one that drew us into this thing, anyway. It's all your fault if anything has happened to Becky."

"What!" exclaimed the amazed Schuyler. "Well, I like that! If it hadn't been for me you'd all be out in the storm, soaked to the skin, by this time. Then you go and shoot all the blame on me—just like a girl!"

"Anyway, something must have happened to Becky," announced Lucile. "She isn't here, and you're the one that's responsible for our being here."

Schuyler began a heated response but at that instant something drew the attention of all from the dispute. From the road came the joyous tooting of an automobile horn!

There was a unanimous yell from the party. As the boys leaped up the strong twin lights of a car flashed into view from the gallery.

"It's coming in here!" cried Cecile.

"Hurrah!" shouted Gus dashing out. "That's no ghost, anyway!"

The boys darted out in the rain while the three girls, in excited suspense, waited together at the

head of the gallery steps. The big car came slowly up the drive and at length stopped. Nothing could be seen of it in the darkness. Then a fresh shout went up from Schuyler and a voice sounded from the car.

"Hello, everyone!"

"It's Becky!" yelled Schuyler and Dusty together.

"Becky?" chorused the girls joyously.

"That's who," announced Becky herself running from the car to the gallery with a quick dash and throwing her arms around Lucile. Amid the exclamations of delight that arose a second and much larger figure followed the girl.

"Oh, father!" Lucile's cry betrayed who he was. Throwing off his wrappings in the shelter of the porch Mr. Hatton gazed around with approval.

"Everyone all right? This isn't a bad place you've found, here! Becky has told me all about it."

"Oh, it's horrible!" interrupted Lucile with a shudder. "We're all afraid of our lives——"

"There's a real ghost!" broke in some one in an awed whisper.

"A ghost?" Mr. Hatton's hearty laugh seemed to dispel some of their fears almost by itself. "Come! Tell me about it!"

"But how did you and Becky come? Tell us that first," replied Lucile. Becky made answer herself.

"I slipped off down to the village to telephone and get something to eat," was her reply. "I found that Mr. Hatton had left the farm to look for us with the car. So I waited at the village and called up everybody, tellin' them we were all right. Then Mr. Hatton came and I brought him out here."

"Before we hear this ghost story," said Mr. Hatton with something like a twinkle in his eye, "let's get matters arranged. Louis!"

"Yes, m'sieu," answered the chauffeur respectfully. He, too, was standing before the fire.

"You and Schuyler had better take all the horses down to the village," returned Mr. Hatton. "You'd better help them, Dustin. Put them in the livery there until we can send for them from the farm. Then get whatever you can find to eat and hurry back."

When Louis and the two boys had departed Mr. Hatton turned cheerily to the others.

"You have to thank Captain Becky for your rescue," he chuckled. "If we hadn't found her at the village we might have gone chasing all over the mountain after you!"

"Oh, you'd have found us all right," disputed

Jack carelessly. "We'd have gone down to the village before, only the girls wouldn't let us, so Becky slipped away. They're all scared of the ghost."

"They!" repeated Billy with some scorn. "Well, I like that! If I was as scared as you were, Jack Humphrey——"

"Here, here, no family rows!" laughed Mr. Hatton. "Now tell me the ghost story."

The recital began and, after each of the party had added his quota of incident and detail, the story was finally finished. Before its conclusion Louis and the boys returned from the Corners, laden with parcels.

"We had to wake the whole blamed village to find the storekeeper," grinned Dusty. "We got enough grub, I guess."

"Well," said Mr. Hatton, "I'm not going to stay out on this open gallery. The storm can't last much longer. Louis and I will open up the house, unless you're all too frightened to go with us?"

The girls hesitated, but fears could not linger under the genial smile of Mr. Hatton, and the party unanimously prepared to accompany him. The two candles were found and lighted. Another was obtained from the living room, and the party started to explore the lower floor of the house.

"What a perfectly beautiful dining room!" cried Cecile, as they entered the third room beyond the living room. "Look at the old china on the plate-rail! There's some old Chelsea—and some real old Blue Willow—— Oh——"

"I'm more interested in the kitchen just now," laughed Becky. "Come on, folks!"

And she dashed ahead of the party, only to stop with a cry of delight. The kitchen was a low-ceilinged, raftered room, with a wood range, its fire all laid. Pots and pans hung around the walls, dusty but still speckless of dirt or rust. The back door was opened to let the room air while the girls, finding some cloths, began to dust things.

The bundles of provisions were opened and Louis started the fire. Schuyler built a fire in the front bedroom and by the time the "snack" was ready the old house began to be almost cozy.

"Well, if you're all ready now, let's go hunting for the ghost," smiled Mr. Hatton at length.

"The ghost!" cried Lucile, "I'd forgotten all about it!"

The fears of all had now fled entirely and it took only a little urging to induce them to go upstairs. Finally the procession started off gayly and on reaching the top of the stairs everyone looked toward the picture. A shriek of surprise arose from the girls. The picture was gone!

"That's funny," exclaimed Dusty, a trifle pale. "It was there a while ago, all right, an' now only the frame's left! What do you make o' that, Mr. Hatton?"

Before he could answer Becky darted across the hall and vanished in one of the rooms beyond.

"Wait a minute," her voice floated back. "I've got something to show you."

Mr. Hatton looked at Schuyler. That young man was grinning shamelessly. While the others discussed the strange disappearance of the picture, Schuyler motioned to Gus, who had the other candle, and the two spoke together for a moment. Their shadows threw the corner holding the frame into deep gloom. When the two boys separated, a second frightened cry arose from the girls—for the "Lady of the Fan" was again in place!

"I'm going back down," exclaimed Lucile, gripping her father's arm tightly. "Don't stay up here!"

Mr. Hatton only laughed as Cecile added her pleas to those of his daughter while Jack and Dusty, looking somewhat alarmed, edged toward the stairs and Gus slowly backed.

"Don't you recognize her?" shouted Schuyler with a yell of laughter when he could hold in no longer. "Lift up your hat, Becky!"

To the astonishment of the party the girl in the

picture threw back her head and disclosed the features of Captain Becky! For a moment everyone stood speechless. Then the boys gave a shout and rushed forward. But Schuyler was ahead of them.

"No you don't!" he cried, pushing them back while Mr. Hatton came forward with a hearty laugh. "Come on down, Becky!"

The girl stepped from the frame and advanced toward the girls. Even then they shrank back and not until Becky laughed and gave her old familiar gesture did they seem fully to realize the imposture.

"Oh, how could you!" exclaimed Lucile, while Billy burst into a laugh and seized Becky's hand.

"I didn't mean to scare you so much, really," protested Becky with a flirt of her fan at Gus. "I'm sorry Lucile——"

"Oh, pshaw!" cried the latter, throwing her arms around Becky. "Why, you look perfectly *grown-up!* We'll have to have a masquerade and you must wear that costume! Not a soul will know you!"

Cecile did not give in so readily but presently she, too, accepted the joke and joined in the unrestrained laughter of the others.

"Well, you certainly handed it to us that time," admitted Jack somewhat confusedly.

"Oh, you 'Lady with the Fan'!" cried Gus more gracefully. "I've got to take off my hat to you in dead earnest this time!" And Becky acknowledged the action with a laughing courtesy.

"Say, were you in on the game all the time?" demanded Dusty suddenly turning on the grinning Schuyler.

"Sure I was!" replied the boy.

"What!" cried his sister in astonishment. "Did you know all about it? I'll never forgive you."

"But how about the other things?" broke in Cecile. "The piano and the footsteps and the voice and the ghost out on the gallery?"

"That was me, too," answered Becky ungrammatically but happily. "I was all alone out there and I thought of that piece—the only thing I ever learned to play. Then I slipped back into the living room. I got a broom there and made the taps by reaching up to the rafters."

"Then you started the clock of course?" inquired Billy. Becky nodded.

"I found the key on top of the mantelpiece. That was when I went in with Sky for the firewood."

"But where did you hide?" asked Lucile in surprise. "And how did you get down to the Corners? We were on the porch all the time and didn't see you!"

"Well," explained Becky with a laugh, "when Sky and I left the second time we started up here to explore. We went into the front room there," and she pointed toward an open door, "and found a lot of clothes. I put them on meaning to go down like that."

"Then we found the empty frame," interposed Schuyler eagerly. "Captain Becky posed for me in it an' she looked so real that I told her to wait an' we'd have some fun. An' we did, too," he added with a chuckle.

"Then you were the ghost that we saw on the gallery?" asked Cecile.

"Sure!" Becky nodded again. "When I was dressin' I found an opening for heat, in the floor. It opened down into the living room. When I heard you starting for here the first time I couldn't help calling down about dying at midnight. I didn't think I'd fool you so bad when you all got up here, but——"

She ended in a peal of laughter as she looked at Gus and the latter joined in ruefully.

"But that doesn't explain about your meeting father," cried Lucile.

"Oh, after you chased down I changed clothes and ran out the back door. I saw you all on the gallery, half scared to death, and then I went down and met Mr. Hatton."

"Well, we'd better get downstairs," laughed Mr. Hatton, turning to the staircase. "There's nothing to be seen up here except clothes and it sounds as if the rain had stopped. If it has, we can clean up the kitchen and start for home. Oh, wait a minute! Here's a note for you, Becky, that came just before I left, so I brought it along. It's from the *Record*."

With an eager exclamation Becky seized it and held it to the light of the candles. Another exclamation followed, this time one of joy, as the girl looked up.

"Good news?" smiled Mr. Hatton. For an instant Becky was about to blurt out her story. Then she caught herself and stopped abruptly.

"Yes," she replied happily, thrusting the note into her waist, "it's from Lewis. He says that Mr. Downs said his write-up of the carnival was a peach, that he's learning fast and maybe he'll get a raise. I'm glad he's making good!"

"So are we," answered Mr. Hatton. "I hope he'll succeed. Well, all aboard for the kitchen!"

Becky lingered behind the others, her arm around Lucile's waist.

"You aren't angry about it, are you?" she whispered.

"Angry!" repeated Lucile. "Why, I should say not! I think you were the dearest, sweetest

little century-old girl I ever heard of! I don't believe I ever could get angry at you, Becky dear!"

And as the two girls descended the stairs together the voice of Schuyler floated back to them.

"Tell you what, Dusty, boys ain't got so much on the girls after all, when it comes to running up against a real ghost!"

"That's right," admitted Dusty and Lucile gave Becky a delighted little hug.

"And what do you think of Captain Becky's Masquerade?" laughed back Mr. Hatton.

The shout that went up was sufficient reply.

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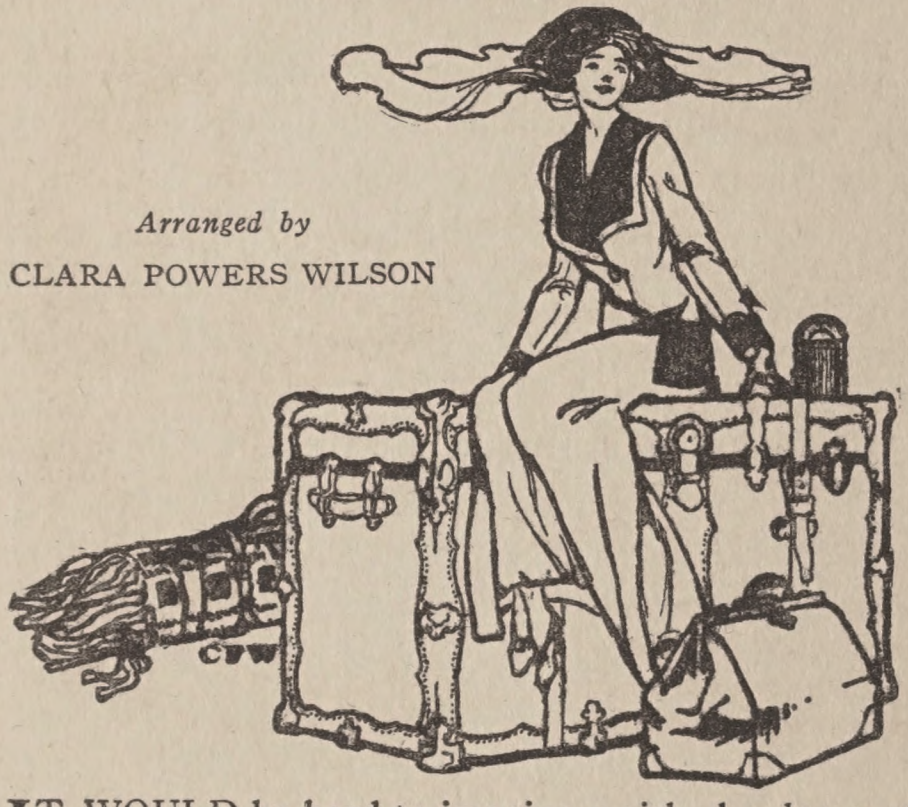

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